THE SOCIAL PLAYS OF ARTHUR WING PINERO

EDITED BY CLAYTON HAMILTON

THE THUNDERBOLT

MID-CHANNEL

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Pinero --Social plays
(The thunderbolt; Mid-channel)

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THE SOCIAL PLAYS OF ARTHUR WING PINERO

THE THUNDERBOLT
MID-CHANNEL

THE SOCIAL PLAYS OF
ARTHUR WING PINERO

Authorized Library Edition. Four Volumes.

EDITED BY
CLAYTON HAMILTON

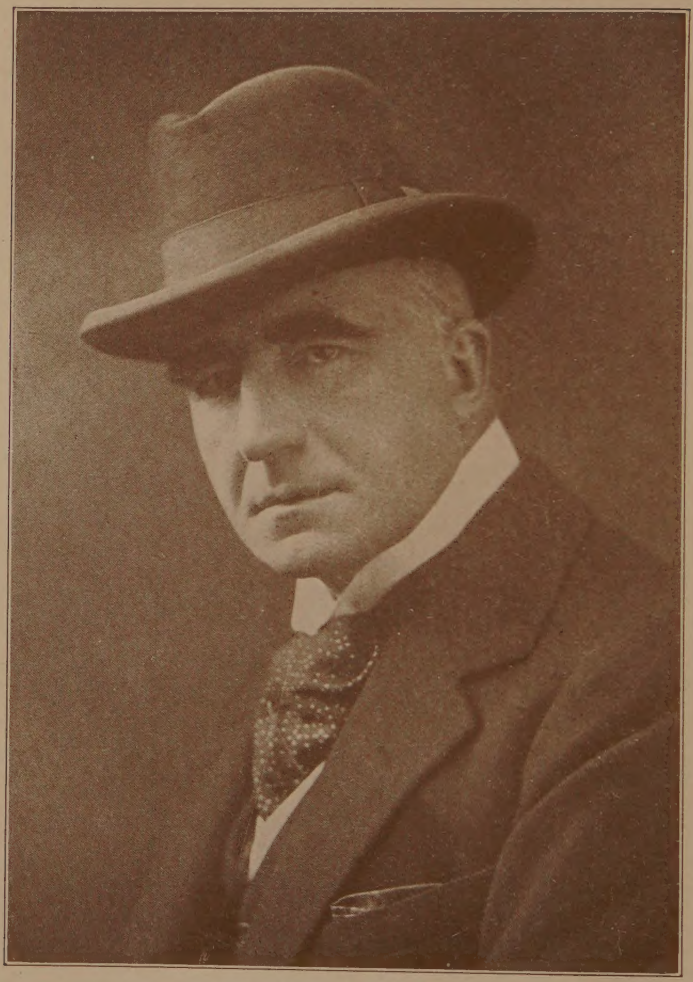
Volume I. The Second Mrs. Tanqueray:
The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith.

Volume II. The Gay Lord Quex:
Iris.

Volume III. Letty:
His House in Order.

Volume IV. The Thunderbolt:
Mid-Channel.

E. P. DUTTON & CO.
681 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK



Yours very truly
Arthur Binns
18th Dec. 1917.

THE SOCIAL PLAYS OF
ARTHUR WING PINERO

EDITED WITH A GENERAL INTRODUCTION
AND A CRITICAL PREFACE TO EACH PLAY
BY

CLAYTON HAMILTON
MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ARTS AND LETTERS

North Central College Library
Naperville, Illinois

THE THUNDERBOLT

MID-CHANNEL

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & CO.
681 FIFTH AVENUE
1922

EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS BY CLAYTON HAMILTON

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

P65
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PREFACE

The present LIBRARY EDITION of the weightiest and most important plays of Sir Arthur Pinero has been edited with the kind co-operation of the author himself; his secretary, Miss Eveleen Mills; his London publisher, Mr. William Heinemann; and his American publishers, Messrs. Walter H. Baker & Co., of Boston. The editor is especially indebted to Mr. F. E. Chase, of Walter H. Baker & Co., for generously loaning the American copyrights of the plays that have been selected to appear in this LIBRARY EDITION.

CLAYTON HAMILTON.

NEW YORK CITY: 1922.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION *

I

A word should be said in explanation of the reasons which prompted the editor to apply the caption, "Social Plays," to the particular group of compositions by Sir Arthur Pinero selected for presentation to the reading public in this LIBRARY EDITION.

In the first place, it was necessary to choose a label which should indicate a clear distinction between the eight or ten serious and weighty dramas of Pinero and his more than thirty essays in lighter types of entertainment. The range of Pinero, in subject-matter and in mood, has been unusually versatile and wide. In the eighteen-eighties, he established a new standard for English farce with the Court Theatre series, which included *The Magistrate, The Schoolmistress, Dandy Dick,* and *The Cabinet Minister,* and was equally successful as an author of sentimental comedies of the type inherited from T. W. Robertson, such as *Sweet Lavender* and *Lady Bountiful.* Obviously, the series of more momentous dramas which was initiated in 1893 with *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* differs from these earlier undertakings not only in magnitude but also in purpose; and this same difference in intention may be noted, in later seasons, between such weighty dramas, on the one hand, as *Iris* and *Mid-Channel,* and, on the other hand, such charming minor comedies as *The Princess and the Butterfly* and such witty pieces of hilarity as *Preserving Mr. Panmure.*

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A French critic would classify the serious plays of Pinero under the generic term of *drames,* and would let the matter go at that; but to choose a more specific label for them is not an easy task. They cannot be classed as "tragedies," since only three of them—*The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, Iris,* and *Mid-Channel*—have a tragic ending. Furthermore, though each of these three plays is irrefragably logical within its limits, their disastrous terminations seem to be predestined mainly by the antecedent pattern, and lack, a little, that intimation of the universal which we demand of tragedy. But neither can these serious dramas of Pinero be classed as "comedies,"—not even in those cases when their subject-matter is most clearly estranged from the tragic. For such a term, *The Gay Lord Quex* is too sardonic in content, *His House in Order* is too harrowing, and *The Thunderbolt* is too terrible. These pieces fulfill the purpose that is usually sought in satiric comedy; but this purpose is pursued with a theatrical intensity that is more nearly tragic than comic in its mood.

In seeking a definitive caption for these dramas which are neither comedies nor tragedies, the editor was reminded of Henrik Ibsen's statement in regard to *Hedda Gabler,*—"What I principally wanted to do was to depict human beings, human emotions, and human destinies, upon a groundwork of certain of the social conditions and principles of the present day." I have previously called attention to this statement in my critical preface to *The Gay Lord Quex;* but it seems to me to describe very aptly the abiding purpose of Pinero in all of his most weighty and important plays.

In a chapter on the modern social drama, in *The Theory of the Theatre,* I have stated that only three distinct types of serious, or tragic, drama have thus far been developed in the theatre of the world. The ancient, or Greek, type exhibits the individual in conflict with destiny; the mediæval, or Elizabethan type, exhibits the individual in conflict with the inhibitions and defects of his own character; and the

modern type exhibits the hero in conflict with his social environment. To repeat once more the words of Ibsen, the modern drama endeavours "to depict human beings, human emotions, and human destinies, upon a groundwork of certain of the social conditions and principles of the present day." Society has latterly been substituted for an external destiny, or an internal predestination, as the arch-antagonist of the individual in the conflict of the drama.

It is in this particular sense that the serious dramas of Pinero may appropriately be described as "Social Plays." Certain commentators have objected to this application of the term, on the ground that Sir Arthur is not primarily concerned, like some of his contemporaries, with an extra-theatrical endeavour to solve the current problems of society. It is true, of course, that Pinero's plays are not "social" in the narrow and restricted sense which this adjective assumes when one applies it to such pieces as *Die Weber,* by Gerhardt Hauptmann, *Les Avariés,* by Eugène Brieux, *Justice,* by John Galsworthy, or even *Getting Married,* by George Bernard Shaw. In Hauptmann's justly celebrated drama, the customary interest in the individual is almost entirely submerged beneath a newly-awakened interest in the group as a dramatic factor in the conflict of society. Brieux employs the theatre mainly as a medium for calling the attention of the public to certain errors and iniquities of the prevailing social system which demand immediate correction. Mr. Galsworthy, also, is much more deeply interested in the problems of society than he is interested in the problems of the individual. In *Justice,* for example, he deliberately diverts attention from his inconspicuous and unimportant hero to that heartless machinery of the law which pitilessly grinds this weak protagonist to pieces. The witty Mr. Shaw is ever ready with some novel panacea for the reformation of society, and, in recent years, has used the theatre mainly as a lecture-platform.

These extra-theatrical purposes—laudable as they are—

stand utterly apart from the intention of Pinero. He applies the ancient and honourable maxim of "art for art's sake," and continues to make plays for the sake of making plays, and for no other and extraneous purpose. In imagining a struggle between human beings and social conditions, his interest remains always on the side of the human beings and is never diverted to the side of the social conditions. He conceives a play primarily as an exhibition of character in action,—upon a groundwork, as Ibsen said, of present-day society. Society affords the setting and the background for his serious dramas; but the forefront of the stage is always occupied by individual actors who are interesting in and for themselves.

In the terminology of dramatic criticism, the adjective "social" had long been applied to the plays of such artistic ancestors of Pinero as Henrik Ibsen, Alexandre Dumas *fils,* and Emile Augier,—before the advent of the thesis-plays of Brieux, the propaganda-plays of Mr. Galsworthy, or the pamphlet-plays of Mr. Shaw. The word "social" should not be reduced to too narrow a connotation, lest an interest in socialism should be mistaken for an interest in society. Any drama which depicts a conflict between individual character and social environment may appropriately be described as a "social drama," whether it casts its emphasis on the side of society or on the side of the individual; and it was this principle which prompted the editor to choose the caption, "Social Plays," as a convenient label for distinguishing the weightier compositions of Sir Arthur Pinero from his numerous delightful essays in lighter types of entertainment.

II

At the date when this INTRODUCTION is written [January, 1922], Sir Arthur Pinero is sixty-six years old and has already contributed forty-eight plays to five successive decades of the English theatre. For this reason, a regrettable habit

has grown up, among several of our younger commentators, of writing about Pinero in the past tense and pigeon-holing his plays as products of the nineteenth century. For a man of sixty-six, Sir Arthur is exceptionally vigorous, both in body and in mind, and there is therefore ample reason to expect him to compose several important plays in the years that are to come; but, even if his career might already be regarded as completed, a glance at the curve of its ascension would show that it did not reach its grand climacteric until the close of the first decade of the twentieth century.

Pinero's compositions in the eighteen-seventies were merely essays in apprenticeship; but in the middle of the eighteen-eighties he established himself, with *The Magistrate,* as a master of farce. Before the end of the same decade, the great success of his sentimental comedy, *Sweet Lavender,* caused him to be regarded at that early date as the leading English playwright of his generation. At the outset of the eighteen-nineties, he deliberately chose to attempt the long step upward from the level of the popular playwright to the level of the serious dramatist; and with *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray,* in 1893, he initiated the modern English drama. It may be questioned if Pinero has surpassed in any of his subsequent endeavours the technical efficiency of that epoch-making composition; but there can be no question that three or four of his later plays have been more important in their content and more monumental in their execution. Several of Sir Arthur's most interesting and successful compositions were written in the eighteen-nineties; but if any commentator were confronted with the hypothetic task of rescuing from the iniquity of oblivion a single ten-year period of this author's long-continued activity, he would choose without question the first decade of the twentieth century. Pinero began this decade with *Iris* [1901] and concluded it with *The Thunderbolt* [1908] and *Mid-Channel* [1909].

To controvert the frequently repeated statements of careless commentators that Pinero should be dated as a dram-

atist of the nineteenth century, it may be noted—as an historic fact—that the two great plays which are presented to the reading public in the present volume were written more recently than the masterpieces of any of Sir Arthur's nearest rivals in the contemporary British theatre. The monumental merit of *Mid-Channel* as a work of art is not, of course, increased by the accidental circumstance that it was written so recently as 1909; but commentators who are tempted to employ the past tense in considering the theatre of Pinero may be convinced of error by examining the dates which follow. Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, the only contemporary British dramatist who was born before Pinero, produced his masterpiece, *Michael and His Lost Angel,* in 1896. *Candida,* the masterpiece of Mr. George Bernard Shaw, was produced in 1895. Nineteen hundred and five is the date of Sir James Barrie's greatest play, *Alice Sit-by-the Fire,* and also of Mr. Granville Barker's greatest play, *The Voysey Inheritance;* and Mr. John Galsworthy produced his masterpiece, entitled *Strife,* in 1909,—the same year in which *Mid-Channel* was set forth.

It is apparent, therefore, that Pinero, though older than any of his rivals, with the single exception of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, has surpassed them not only at the outset but also toward the latter end of his career. The two plays presented in the present volume—*The Thunderbolt* and *Mid-Channel*—may already be regarded as the two greatest plays of British authorship that have been given to the world in the first two decades of the twentieth century; for neither of these impressive compositions have been surpassed by any English playwright, old or young, in the decade that has elapsed since 1909.

III

To complete the record of Sir Arthur Pinero's career to the time of the writing of this INTRODUCTION, a few words

must be appended in appreciation of the plays that he has written since 1909, the date of the production of *Mid-Channel*.

I have previously stated that *Preserving Mr. Panmure*,—a farce which was first presented in London, at the Comedy Theatre, on January 19th, 1911,—was undertaken frankly as a vacationary task, in order that the author might rest his mind from a momentary weariness imposed by the composition of *The Thunderbolt* and *Mid-Channel* in two successive years. The merits of *Preserving Mr. Panmure* are mainly technical. The material of this comic play is trivial and slight; but the development displays an ingenuity of which no other craftsman than Pinero could be capable. The third act, which is fabricated out of next to nothing, is a triumph of deft manipulation. The pattern as a whole, however, is imperfect, because the fourth act, though entertaining in itself, does not work out the antecedent project to a logical completion. It is, in effect, an independent one-act play, in which three characters inherited from the preceding incompleted comedy happen, by a lucky providence, to reappear. Of this fourth act—as in the instance of the last act of *The Profligate*—two versions are extant:—the one originally shown in London, and an alternative text, prepared at the request of the late Charles Frohman, for the first production of the play in New York, which took place at the Lyceum Theatre on February 27th, 1912.

Preserving Mr. Panmure is designed as a satire of that sanctimonious hypocrisy which may be observed in many a British household. The stage-set, which represents the inner hall of a house in the country, is built almost entirely of glass,—as a sort of warning to the witty spectator that it is sometimes dangerous to throw stones. The smug and unctuous Mr. Panmure, at the behest of his religious-minded wife, is accustomed to preach a weekly sermon to his assembled servants, and expects an absolute respectability of behaviour from his guests. At a loss for a subject for his

"sermonette," he is aided by the pretty governess of his little daughter, and, in an outburst of approbation, kisses her. A kiss, in the Panmure household, is a crime. Panmure is immediately remorseful; and the governess is so perturbed that she unwittingly reveals the scandal to Mrs. Panmure's aunt. The latter soon communicates the dire intelligence to all the other women in the house,—each of whom, since the governess refuses to betray the name of her assailant (although she expressly exonerates Mr. Panmure), at once suspects her own husband, or fiancé, as the case may be, of being the guilty man. Panmure himself is required by his wife to cross-question all the other men and to reprove them each and all for the offence that they have not committed. Two of the guests, an M. P. named Stulkely and his secretary named Woodhouse, discover that Panmure is the culprit before he comes to lecture them. They are thereby primed to call him down; and after they have beaten him into deserved abjection, Woodhouse chivalrously takes the guilt upon himself and makes a false confession to the assembled women. Thereupon, the governess destroys the manuscript of Panmure's prospective sermon, and sends him forth to preach impromptu to the servants.

The mood of this farce is one of irresponsible vivacity, and several of the incidents are playfully preposterous. Yet the people in the play are rendered not as caricatures but as characters: they are much more true to life than the figures usually shown in farce. The dialogue, throughout, is brilliantly witty. The work as a whole affords an interesting instance of fine craftsmanship applied to trivial material.

IV

Pinero's next effort was a comedy of much more serious import. This was *The "Mind the Paint" Girl,* which was first produced in London, at the Duke of York's Theatre, on February 17th, 1912.

There is a type of play whose purpose is not so much to exhibit character through action as to exhibit environment through character. The plot is comparatively unimportant, and the people of the play are less interesting on their own account than on account of the social atmosphere in which they breathe their daily breath. This social atmosphere is what the author is aiming to depict; and, in pursuance of this purpose, he may even dare to sacrifice the all-but-indispensable element of a tense and vital struggle between human wills.

In order to appreciate *The "Mind the Paint" Girl,* we should understand at the outset that the aim of the author was to exhibit a *genre* study, and not to build a drama, in the ordinary sense of the term. So many young peers had recently married show-girls that it became important that some serious British writer should discuss the advantages and disadvantages of these marital experiments; and Sir Arthur Pinero, who had already painted a sympathetic picture of the stage-life of other days in *Trelawny of the "Wells,"* was obviously the man to undertake a study of the glittering and artificial life that was lived so shallowly and so alluringly in and about Mr. George Edwardes's Gaiety Theatre, at a period when the chorus of the Gaiety was furnishing more than one of the mothers of the future members of the House of Lords.

Of the four acts of *The "Mind the Paint" Girl,* only one—the third—is designed to be dramatic. The entire struggle of the play is compressed into a single vital scene; and all that precedes this sudden climax should be classed and judged as *genre* painting. The heroine, Lily Parradell, is the reigning beauty of the Pandora Theatre, and has won her nickname by singing a popular topical song called "Mind the Paint." In the first act we meet her in her home, and in the second act we see her in the theatre. The author's purpose in these first two acts is to make us intimately acquainted with the daily environment of such a girl,

both in and out of the playhouse. Over thirty typical characters are set before us, and all of them are sketched with masterly and rapid strokes. After two acts we know them intimately, and we begin to realize that the heroine must be at heart a girl of quite extraordinary worth to have kept herself unspotted from this world of the Pandora Theatre.

She is, indeed, a charming person. Her character is revealed, bit by bit, in little sudden deeds and unexpected speeches, until she stands before us every inch alive. In the entire gallery of his invention, Sir Arthur has never exhibited a more perfect portrait; and Lily is one of the most lovable of all his women. It is a higher achievement to create a human being than to build a plot; and the figure of Lily Parradell alone would be sufficient to justify the composition of this comedy of atmosphere.

In the dramatic third act, two lovers battle for her favour. One, the Viscount Farncombe, is a young nobleman who has known her only a week: the other, Captain Jeyes, has been playing the faithful dog to her for many months and has given up his career in the army so that he may haunt the theatre every night. When Lord Farncombe asks Lily to marry him, she replies by telling him the entire story of her life, in order to prove to him that her humble origin and defective bringing-up would unfit her to become a peeress. Jeyes then breaks in, and upbraids her violently for having wrecked his life; and, partly as a reparation to the Captain, but mainly from a desire to defend the Viscount from ruining his life in turn for her sake, Lily refuses the offer of Lord Farncombe and agrees to marry Captain Jeyes.

In the next act, which may be regarded as a sort of epilogue, the Captain has decided to retire to South Africa, and generously hands the "Mind the Paint" girl over to the Viscount. This act is psychologically true; but the impression cannot be avoided that the author has been pulling wires to bring about a happy ending.

The piece is notable mainly for the veracity of the *genre*

painting of its first two acts, and for the literary tact of its dialogue. Lily's recital of her career—as Mr. William Archer has enthusiastically said—is one of the finest single passages of writing that Sir Arthur Pinero has ever penned; and though *The "Mind the Paint" Girl* cannot be ranked with such moving and soul-searching dramas as *Iris* and *Mid-Channel,* it is, in its own way, an achievement fully worthy of its author's fame.

V

After turning out a couple of one-act plays of merely minor interest, Pinero set himself for the undertaking of another major comedy. *The Widow of Wasdale Head* [1912] was a ghost-story in one act, composed to order for the late Charles Frohman, who desired to exhibit at the Duke of York's Theatre a programme made up of three new one-act plays,—one by Pinero, one by Barrie, and one by Shaw. *Playgoers* [1913] was a much more sprightly composition in the one-act form. In this little piece, the mistress of a household conceived the happy thought of giving her servants a good time, and also contributing to their much-desired education, by sending them systematically to the theatre; but the servants soon astounded her by rebelling violently against this cruel and inhuman punishment.

The Big Drum, a comedy in four acts, was conceived before the sudden launching of the German hordes against the quiet camps of civilization; and the success of this worthy and interesting drama was disturbed by that chaos in theatrical conditions which resulted from the unexpected outbreak of the war of the nations. *The Big Drum* was first produced in London, at the St. James's Theatre, on September 1st, 1915, with the late Sir George Alexander in the leading part. The time looked dark for England; and, in a moment of apparent national calamity, the theatre-going public resented the "unhappy" ending of the piece.

This ending was "unhappy" only in the sense that the lovers were logically parted in the final moments of the drama; but—as the author has explained in print—"pressure was forthwith put upon me to reconcile Philip and Ottoline at the finish, and at the third performance of the play the curtain fell upon the picture, violently and crudely brought about, of Ottoline in Philip's arms."

This was the third time in his career that Pinero had been persuaded to reconsider the logical termination of a play in response to an appeal from the public,—the other two instances having occurred in the case of *The Profligate* and in the case of *Preserving Mr. Panmure.* In all three instances, however, Sir Arthur has insisted that the published texts should perpetuate a record of his original intention. The printed text of *The Big Drum* concludes with the primary ending which, in the actual performance, was discarded after the second night. In explaining this diversity, Sir Arthur has stated:—"I made the alteration against my principles and against my conscience, and yet not altogether unwillingly. For we live in depressing times; and perhaps in such times it is the first duty of a writer for the stage to make concessions to his audiences and, above everything, to try to afford them a complete, if brief, distraction from the gloom which awaits them outside the theatre."

The altered version of *The Big Drum* ran at the St. James's Theatre for a good part of the season; but the piece was not so easily successful as it might have been in days less dark. Considered solely in respect to its inherent merits, this four-act comedy is the best play that has been written by Pinero since *Mid-Channel.* Though conceived primarily as a satiric composition, it is seriously and almost strenuously dramatic. Not only does it titillate a critical and antithetic sense of laughter, but it also evokes the more impressive tribute of sympathetic tears.

In *The Big Drum,* Pinero satirises once again the vulgarity

of a family of social climbers. The family of which Sir Randle Filson is the head is very rich in new-made money, and is attempting to buy its way into the conservative circles of good society. The spectacle of this endeavour affords a theme for satire to Philip Mackworth, a promising young novelist, who is the hero of the comedy. Mackworth conceives a new novel—entitled "The Big Drum"—which he describes as follows:—"It's an attempt to portray the struggle for notoriety—for self-advertisement—we see going on around us to-day. It shows a vast crowd of men and women forcing themselves upon public attention without a shred of modesty, fighting to obtain it as if they are fighting for bread and meat. It shows how dignity and reserve have been cast aside as virtues that are antiquated and outworn, until half the world—the world that should be orderly, harmonious, beautiful—has become an arena for the exhibition of vulgar ostentation or almost superhuman egoism—a cockpit resounding with raucous voices bellowing one against the other!"

This tilting satirist, Philip Mackworth, has long been in love with the widowed Ottoline, Comtesse de Chaumié, who is the only daughter of the moneyed and drum-beating Sir Randle Filson. She promises to marry him; and, when her climbing parents object that Mackworth is penniless and unsuccessful, this daring hero agrees to stake the outcome of his suit upon the popular success of his next novel, "The Big Drum." This novel, shortly after the date of its initial publication, becomes surprisingly commercial. Thousands of copies are sold within a month. All goes well until the snooping brother of the Comtesse Ottoline discovers, with the aid of hired detectives, that most of the sold copies have been stored in bulk in a cellar in the suburbs. It transpires, ultimately, that Ottoline has bought up several thousand copies of "The Big Drum" in order to make it seem successful. But this deed of intended generosity, instead of winning Mackworth's heart, is the one thing that finally

convinces him that Ottoline is irremediably vulgar. He still longs so ardently to marry her that he is willing to renounce his principles, and even to renounce his art, in order to reconcile his standards with those of this unprincipled and fascinating woman; but, in the end of all, she says farewell to him forever, because she sees more clearly than the novelist himself the underlying falsity of their relation.

VI

In the midst of the Great War, Pinero projected a fantastic comedy, in three acts, entitled *The Freaks*. This "idyll of Suburbia" was first produced in London, at the New Theatre, on February 14th, 1918. It was not successful, and was withdrawn from the boards on March 30th.

In imagining this piece, Sir Arthur went far afield in the endeavour to entertain a war-worn public. He even went so far as to trespass upon provinces held hitherto, by right of eminent domain, by his friend and colleague, Sir James Barrie. *The Freaks* was a play that ought to have been written by Barrie if it were to be written at all. The mild and gentle Mrs. Herrick, who dwells in Mole Park, a peaceful suburb of London, inherits from her brother, who had run a circus in America, the duty of being kind to several members of his "world-renowned mammoth international hippodrome and museum of living marvels." To fulfill the stipulations of her brother's will, Mrs. Herrick invites to visit her, upon a quiet week-end, a group of "living marvels," composed of a human skeleton, a giant, two dwarfs, and an acrobatic lady who is able to tie herself into intricate knots. These freaks arrive in Mole Park, and scandalise the neighbours; and when the giant suddenly falls ill and becomes house-ridden, the suburban villa of Mrs. Herrick is made a focus for inquisitorial eyes. The purpose of the play is to emphasise the arch-satiric point that the physical "freaks" of the circus are, in reality, less freakish than those suburban

citizens who gape and glare at them in their moments of basical humanity. But the author, not content with establishing this primary thesis of his satire, has made the play unplausible by attempting to carry even further the dramatic appeal of his group of circus "freaks" for public sympathy. Mrs. Herrick has a daughter and a son who are depicted as absolutely normal; but the author asks us to believe that Sheila Herrick falls in love with the human skeleton and that Ronald Herrick falls in love with the illiterate lady of the circus who is able to tie herself into knots. If these assumptions might be granted, the patterned outcome of the comedy would be more effective than it actually is. The "freaks" decide, as a matter of duty, to tear themselves away from the temptation to revert to the human privileges of ordinary life, by accepting a peremptory engagement to appear in public with a circus that is performing half the world away. This heroical decision brings about a parting that is undeniably pathetic. But, when the rupture comes, the critical spectator is still inclined to wonder whether the antecedent complication was not, after all, fortuitous.

VII

During the early months of 1919, Pinero composed a new comedy, entitled *Quick Work: A Story of a War Marriage.* The title is explained in a summary line that is spoken by the heroine in the second act,—"Met in January, married in February, and now—only June." The sprightly heroine, Dordine, has married in haste a "hero" of the war, Captain Neil Whitway. Three months later, when her most intimate friends embrace the quickest opportunity to congratulate her on her marriage, she informs them that it has already turned out badly and that she is seeking separate quarters for her husband in order to establish legal grounds for suing him for divorce on the basis of desertion. Captain Whitway and Dordine, though "incompatible in temper,"

are evidently destined to be friends; for they collaborate without apparent friction in the necessary task of setting up a separate establishment for the disappointed "hero" who has failed to qualify as a husband. The basic facts of the story are assumed in retrospect; and the author devotes the entire time afforded by the three acts of the comedy to a detailed outline of the psychologic steps which ultimately lead to a reconciliation of the married lovers whose romance has been disturbed by the unprecedented *tempo* at which their love-song has necessarily been chanted.

In no preceding composition has Pinero dispensed so utterly with the interest of plot and confined his attention so absolutely to the interest of character. The narrative material of *Quick Work* is perilously thin; for nothing happens on the stage, except at a single strong moment in the final act which is a little reminiscent of the famous climax of *Antony,* by Alexandre Dumas *père.* Only four people—barring supernumeraries—are exhibited in the course of the comedy; but these four characters are studied with meticulous exactitude. The dialogue is happily conceived and written very naturally. Sir Arthur, in sending me a prompt-copy of *Quick Work,* explained that he "did not attach much importance to the piece, since it was very light," and hinted toward the composition of a "more substantial play" in the near future.

CLAYTON HAMILTON.

THE THUNDERBOLT

CRITICAL PREFACE *

The Thunderbolt was written immediately after *His House in Order,* and was first presented, at the St. James's Theatre, in London, on May 9th, 1908. The sub-title of this play describes it as "An Episode in the History of a Provincial Family." Here again, as in *His House in Order,* the author has devoted his attention not so much to the depiction of individual characters as to the study of a family regarded in the aspect of a collective social entity; and his arraignment of the Mortimores is even more drastic and bitter than his previous arraignment of the Ridgeleys. In retrospect, the antecedent effort may be regarded as a sort of "try-out" for this later masterpiece of the sardonic mood.

The trouble with the family as a social unit is that its members are selected helter-skelter by a capricious and unreasonable providence. It is logical for men to choose their friends; in fact, they spend a lifetime in a conscious effort to find a few congenial fellow-mortals with whom they may be easily companionable and naturally intimate; and any person is lucky who can discover half a dozen veritable friends in three score years and ten. But the family most frequently imposes a false assumption of friendship upon people who are not at all allied in character or temperament. A man is expected, without choice, to love his parents, or his brothers, or his sisters, because of the mere accident of consanguinity; and often, by convention, he is set into a strange relation with several people whom he would never have chosen freely for his friends,—under circumstances which, in their imposition of an artificial intimacy, trangress

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the imaginable borders of the delicate. To a reasonable mind, there is something almost indecent in an artificial intimacy with an utter stranger,—even though this utter stranger may be a man's own brother or his father. Thus the family, by imposing the usages of intimacy upon people who are not by nature intimate, often undermines the basic duty of the individual to sustain the integrity of his own soul, by suggesting the minor obligation of maintaining a false series of affectionate pretences.

The family, considered as a social entity, has long been lauded in England as a bulwark of "respectability"; but Pinero evidently hates the British family as an artificial institution which leads dangerously to the acceptance of many well-intended lies which result in a twisting of natural incentives and a thwarting of the free and orderly development of individual character. In all fairness, there is no apparent reason for detesting any of the various members of the Mortimore family; and Thaddeus, the youngest brother in the group, is positively likable; yet the spectacle of this assembled family awakens an emotion that is closely akin to hatred.

This play was not popular in London; and, though accepted with respect on the two occasions when it was shown in the United States—first, by the New Theatre, of New York, and, second, by the Drama Players, of Chicago—it has never achieved a notable commercial success in America. In discussing with the author the comparative failure of *The Thunderbolt* at the box-office, I suggested that the people of the audience were made to hate so bitterly the people of the play that the public experienced an uncomfortable evening and went away with an impression of antagonism against a drama whose participants were so emphatically undeserving of the wished response of human sympathy. Thereupon, Sir Arthur surprised me by declaring that he personally "loved" every one of the characters assembled in *The Thunderbolt*. He repeated, in different

words, the remark assigned to Trist, in the second act, to the effect that "their faults of manner and breeding are precisely the faults a reasonable, dispassionate person would have no difficulty in excusing." He told me that—regardless of the predilections of the theatre-going public—he had grown to be more deeply interested in the destinies of mature people who had "somehow gone awry" than in the roseate hopes of young people, like his erstwhile Little Lavender, whose actual experience of life still swam ahead of them. The Mortimores, he said, resembled very closely the majority of ordinary people in their forties or their fifties, and it would be uncharitable not to love them. In attempting to account for the comparative unpopularity of *The Thunderbolt* in the commercial theatre, I then suggested to the author that the people in the audience might be inclined subconsciously to resent the exhibition on the stage of veritably living characters that were too similar to themselves. The average attendant at the theatre judges a piece entirely upon the basis of its subject-matter. If he likes the characters, and likes the story, he goes away with the impression that he likes the play. It is much more difficult for the casual patron of the box-office to appreciate the mastery that may have been bestowed by a veritable artist upon the task of depicting life as it is actually lived in countless ordinary families by countless ordinary people.

Yet, for a critical student of the theatre, there can be no finer pleasure than to watch with understanding the doing of a worthy work that is done supremely well. This fine pleasure, which may be derived only rarely from an observation of the contemporary drama, is afforded by a study of *The Thunderbolt*. In order to receive the fullest satisfaction of a masterpiece, it is necessary—in the memorable words of Edgar Allan Poe—to "contemplate it with a kindred art." Sir Arthur Pinero, in the composition of this play, has paid his auditors the compliment of asking from them an alertness of intelligence that is answerable to his

own. To dismiss *The Thunderbolt* as "unpleasant" is to confess an incapacity for those finer pleasures that are based upon experience and education,—the pleasure of recognising truth in a wise delineation of life, and the pleasure of following point by point the unfaltering development of a faultless pattern.

There can be no safer formula for making a great play than to start out with a conventional plot and, while retaining most of its familiar incidents, to make the old fabric look strange and new by telling the truth about it. To populate such a plot with living characters so real that they assume dominion over it, and thus to shift the emphasis from the element of incident to the element of character, to reject at crucial moments the expected in favour of the true—in other words, to pluck out the heart of the mystery that has hitherto lain latent in the story—this is the surest way to achieve in the drama a work of original imagination. *The Thunderbolt* tells anew the old story of the lost and stolen will, and two of its four acts come to a climax in scenes of confession and cross-examination; but in Sir Arthur's drama this familiar plot is set forth no longer for its own sake, but rather for the sake of laying bare the inmost nature of the various members of a provincial British family.

The Mortimores—James, Stephen, Thaddeus, and their wives, Rose, and her husband, Colonel Ponting—are all (excepting Mrs. Thaddeus) well along in their forties and fifties. They are middle-class people, devoid of breeding and of education; but they are respectable and sturdy, and are generally esteemed in the small town of Singlehampton, where they live. They have been, in the worldly sense, only moderately successful—James, as a contractor and builder, Stephen as a local editor, Rose as a climber in London society, and Thaddeus (the most likable of the lot) as a professor of music. Their comparative eminence in their little town has given them a habit of assumption which they have found it difficult to maintain upon their slender means. The men have become brawling and embittered, the women incisive

and acidulous. They had an elder brother, Edward, who ran away from Singlehampton at an early age and subsequently amassed a large fortune as a brewer. They have always chosen to look upon Edward as the black sheep of the family; but when, in his last illness, he is persuaded by his solicitor to send for them to say a final farewell, they all rush pell-mell to his house in the city of Linchpool in the hope of inheriting some of the wealth that he has earned by the (to them) disreputable business of brewing beer.

In the first act, they are exhibited at a conference with their lawyers in a room immediately below that in which the dead body of their brother is lying. They have learned, with surprise and trepidation, that Edward has left an illegitimate daughter, named Helen Thornhill, a girl of twenty-four, now an art student in Paris, of whom their dead brother was always very fond. They have been instructed also that unless Edward has made a will in Helen's favour, all of his vast estate will fall in equal shares to them, the next of kin. A diligent search has not revealed the existence of a will. The situation calls forth all of the cupidity that is latent in their various temperaments. They argue, quarrel, agree, dissent, and reconcile themselves as they severally grasp at the money that an unexpected chance has dropped among them. The scene is redolent of Molière in his satiric vein; but it is much more bitter and sardonic. When Helen arrives, they grudgingly offer her a curtailed allowance; and this she proudly and somewhat bitterly refuses. She, the only one among them all who knew and loved the dead man, will not accept any of his money as a charity from the vultures who are preying upon his corpse.

A month passes, during which the solicitors advertise without result for information concerning a possible will. Helen is visiting Thaddeus and his wife, whom she dislikes much less than the other members of the family. She has grown very fond of their children. Mrs. Thaddeus is by far the best wife and mother among the Mortimores; but she has always been despised and insulted by her sisters-in-

law, because her father kept a grocery shop. This attitude on the part of her relatives by marriage has won Helen's sympathy for Mrs. Thaddeus. Furthermore, Mrs. Thaddeus has been very nervous for some time and has not been sleeping well. On the eve of a family conference to settle the estate, Mrs. Thaddeus breaks down and confesses to her husband that, just before Edward's death, she discovered in his safe a will in which he left all his wealth to a young woman in Paris—who was at that time unknown to her, but who was in fact his daughter, Helen Thornhill—and that she destroyed this will and cast the pieces into the river Linch. Her husband goes to the family conference, and, substituting himself for his wife in the story that he has to tell, flings this thunderbolt into the midst of the clawing, cackling harpies. They are completely stunned, until somebody discovers a slight inconsistency in the story that has been told to them. They then ply Thaddeus with questions, which become more and more embarrassing, until at last he is broken down and forced to confess that his wife and not himself destroyed the will. Then everybody rushes to the house of Thaddeus to see if anything may yet be saved from the ruin of their hopes.

Helen, facing the alternative of sending Mrs. Thaddeus to prison, chooses to compromise and to divide the estate with the relatives of her father. Thaddeus and his wife renounce their share, but Helen insists that it shall be settled on their children. Much to the general disgust, she insists also that a share shall be given to a hospital in Linchpool in memory of her father. Her attitude, in this last act, is neither magnanimous nor sentimental; it is merely generous and right. The play closes with a suggestion that she may ultimately find a life companion in a young curate, named Trist, who has been lodging with Mr. and Mrs. Thaddeus.

This framework is decorated with a scathing satire of that sordidness which seethes to the surface of ordinary natures when they are suddenly stirred by the prospect of a great wealth which they have never done anything to deserve. All

that is mean and nasty in the natures of the Mortimores is called forth by the situation into which they are cast. Assuredly—to use the language of Macbeth—they make a sorry sight. Helen depicts them truly in the second act when she says, "But I'm sure it isn't good, morally, for me to be here. . . . If I remained here, all that's bad in my nature would come out on top." Yet, on the other hand, it is likely that most of the people in the audience who dare to call these characters "unpleasant" would behave in much the same way if they were flung suddenly into a similar situation. As Trist says, in the play, "Their faults of manner and breeding are precisely the faults a reasonable, dispassionate person would have no difficulty in excusing." And, as Thaddeus says, even more justly, in his final defence of his wife, "You've seen her at a disadvantage—a terrible disadvantage. Few—few pass through life without being seen—once—or oftener—at a disadvantage." The Mortimores are sordid and despicable people, if you will; but few people would show themselves otherwise than sordid and despicable if they saw two hundred thousand dollars hovering unexpectedly within their grasp.

Technically, this play is notable in so many points that only a small proportion of them can be called up for attention. In the first act, no fewer than twelve people are introduced upon the stage, and scarcely for a moment are less than eight people gathered upon the scene. Yet not only is an intricate story completely expounded in this initial act, but also the characters of all these dozen people are intimately drawn, in a dialogue that flutters all around the stage in crisp sentences and phrases that reveal entirely the individual natures of the speakers. Only a playwright can fully realise the difficulty of this technical task and the grace of its accomplishment.

An interesting innovation in technique was introduced in the time-scheme of *The Thunderbolt*. The second and third acts overlap each other. At the end of the second act, a servant appears at the house of Thaddeus and informs him

that the assembled members of the family are waiting for him at the house of his brother James. At the outset of the third act, we find ourselves in the midst of this family conference; but three minutes of actual acting time elapse before the servant is summoned and despatched upon the errand whose completion we have already witnessed at the conclusion of the antecedent act. This device has subsequently been adopted by several other playwrights; but Pinero was the first technician to employ it on the stage.

Whereas a lesser dramatist would have rung down his third curtain on the collapse of Thaddeus at the conclusion of his tragic confession, Pinero appends a scene which is terribly comic, in order to work out to the last hateful and laughable detail the effect of the confession on the other members of the family.

Whereas almost any other author would have succumbed to the temptation to sentimentalise over Helen's generosity in the last act, Pinero carries off the situation in a mood that is serenely stern. When Mrs. Thaddeus sinks weeping at the feet of Helen, the latter, in the very moment of forgiving her, walks away from her instead of helping her to rise. And, at the end, Helen suggests that no word should pass between the woman who has wronged her and herself for the next six months; after which—and here is the human point—she hopes that Mrs. Thaddeus will again invite her for a visit.

Humanly, *The Thunderbolt* is unique in many ways. It is one of the few great plays of history in which there is no love story. It is merely suggested that, at some time subsequent to the play, Helen may possibly fall in love with Trist. Not for a single moment is attention called to the fact that any of the other characters is, in the sexual sense, a man or a woman. This is, in modern art, and especially in the art of Pinero, a remarkable departure from the usual. Pinero's later plays have dealt nearly always with some intricacy of relation between the sexes; and all contemporary art is drenched with what—to use a German-sounding word

—we may call sex-consciousness. In this, our modern art belies the modesty of nature; for in actual life it is only now and then that we are conscious of our sex. Most of the time we are not males or females, but merely human beings. And it is gratifying to observe a play in which all the people are exhibited upon the common ground of human nature, without awareness of diversity of sex.

It is especially notable, in *The Thunderbolt,* that the crime of destroying the will and the consequent crime of lying about the circumstances of its destruction, are committed impulsively by the two people in the Mortimore family who are, from first to last, the most likable of the lot. This is a very subtle point in the psychology of personal obliquity. Mrs. Thaddeus, who destroys the will, is a better person than the other women who merely profit by her crime; and Thaddeus, who tells an elaborate lie, has a truer nature than the brothers who detect him in his falsification. This great ethical principle, that people must be judged not by their unpremeditated deeds but by their abiding and essential personality, was clearly expounded, many centuries ago, by the wisest of all men, Dante Alighieri; but it is often lost sight of in modern art by authors whose vision is less clear than that of Sir Arthur Pinero.

Considered from the narrow outlook of sheer technical accomplishment, *The Thunderbolt* may reasonably be regarded as the ultimate monument of intensive artistry in the modern drama. I know no other play, of any period, that has ever been more finely made. When the piece was new, a good and faithful friend of the author and the editor—Mr. Henry Arthur Jones—complained against it in a private conversation with the present writer which may now be reported without embarrassment, by reason of the passage of the years. Mr. Jones said to me, a decade ago, that he regarded *The Thunderbolt* as faulty in construction, by reason of the fact that the third act did not advance the story but merely repeated a passage of narrative with which the audience had already been made completely acquainted at

the conclusion of the second act. While appreciating the reasonable fundament of this objection, I replied that this apparent repetition was, in my opinion, the most admirable feature of the structure of *The Thunderbolt*. In the second act, the secret of the plot was delivered to the audience; and, in the third act, the audience—acquainted already with the underlying facts—was prepared to devote an undisrupted attention to the effect of the delivery of these facts upon the assembled members of the Mortimore family. By this unusual device, a play of plot was suddenly transmuted and transfigured to a play of character. I still believe that my initial opinion of this matter was correct; and I dare say that so generous a commentator as Mr. Henry Arthur Jones has latterly withdrawn his previous objection.

The dialogue of *The Thunderbolt* shows the writing of Pinero at his best. In no other of his compositions has he succeeded so unquestionably in distinguishing the natural key of unpremeditated conversation from the more formal key of studied and premeditated prose. A passage toward the end of the second act, in which the dazed and inarticulate Thaddeus vaguely repeats, in speech after speech, the last words that have been uttered by his wife in the course of her delivery of an unexpected thunderbolt, should be studied by all sedulous apprentices to the craft of composition for the current stage; and the exit-speech of Thaddeus in the final act should be studied meticulously, also, for its exhibition of the dramatic virtue of repeating, over and over again, a few fundamental words. Any student of the drama is entitled to form his own opinion of the ultimate importance of the subject-matter of *The Thunderbolt;* but the present commentator may be permitted to venture the assertion that no other modern play, with the possible exception of *Mid-Channel,* is more nearly perfect in construction, nor more nearly impeccable—in respect to recent standards—in the composition of its dialogue.

C. H.

THE THUNDERBOLT

AN EPISODE IN THE HISTORY OF A PROVINCIAL FAMILY,
IN FOUR ACTS

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JAMES MORTIMORE
ANN, *his wife*
STEPHEN MORTIMORE
LOUISA, *his wife*
THADDEUS MORTIMORE
PHYLLIS, *his wife*
JOYCE, CYRIL } *The Thaddeus Mortimores' children*
COLONEL PONTING
ROSE, *his wife, née Mortimore*
HELEN THORNHILL
THE REV. GEORGE TRIST
MR. VALLANCE, *solicitor, of Singlehampton*
MR. ELKIN, *solicitor, of Linchpool*
MR. DENYER, *a house-agent*
HEATH, *a man-servant*
A servant girl at Nelson Villas
Two others at "Ivanhoe"

The scene of the First Act is laid at Linchpool, a city in the Midlands. The rest of the action takes place, a month later, in the town of Singlehampton.

THE THUNDERBOLT

Original cast, as first disclosed at the St. James's Theatre, May 9th, 1908.

JAMES MORTIMORE . . .	*Mr. Louis Calvert*
ANN (his Wife) . . .	*Miss Kate Bishop*
STEPHEN MORTIMORE . .	*Mr. Norman Forbes*
LOUISA (his Wife) . . .	*Miss Alice Beet*
THADDEUS MORTIMORE .	*Mr. George Alexander*
PHYLLIS (his Wife) . .	*Miss Mabel Hackney*
JOYCE, CYRIL (The Thaddeus Mortimores' Children)	*Miss Mignon Clifford*, *Master Cyril Bruce*
COLONEL PONTING . . .	*Mr. Wilfrid Draycott*
ROSE (his Wife, née Mortimore)	*Miss May Palfrey*
HELEN THORNHILL . .	*Miss Stella Campbell*
THE REV. GEORGE TRIST .	*Mr. Reginald Owen*
MR. VALLANCE (Solicitor, of Singlehampton) . . .	*Mr. Julian Royce*
MR. ELKIN (Solicitor, of Linchpool)	*Mr. J. D. Beveridge*
MR. DENYER (a House-agent)	*Mr. F. J. Arlton*
HEATH (a Manservant) .	*Mr. Richard Haigh*
A SERVANT GIRL AT NELSON VILLAS	*Miss Gladys Dale*
TWO OTHERS AT "IVANHOE"	*Miss Sybil Maurisse*, *Miss Vere Sinclair*

THE THUNDERBOLT

THE FIRST ACT

The scene represents a large, oblong room, situated on the ground floor and furnished as a library. At the back, facing the spectator, are three sash windows, slightly recessed, with venetian blinds. There is a chair in each recess. At the further end of the right-hand wall a door opens from the hall, the remaining part of the wall —that nearer to the audience—being occupied by a long dwarf-bookcase. This bookcase finishes at each end with a cupboard, and on the top of each cupboard stands a lamp. The keys of the cupboards are in their locks.

On the left-hand side of the room, in the middle of the wall, is a fireplace with a fender-stool before it, and on either side of the fireplace there is a tall bookcase with glazed doors. A high-backed armchair faces the fireplace at the further end. A smoking-table with the usual accessories, a chair, and a settee stand at the nearer end of the fireplace, a few feet from the wall.

Almost in the centre of the room, facing the spectator, there is a big knee-hole writing-table with a lamp upon it. On the further side of the table is a writing-chair. Another chair stands beside the table.

On the right, near the dwarf-bookcase, there is a circular library-table on which are strewn books, newspapers, and magazines. Round this table a settee and three chairs are arranged.

The furniture and decorations, without exhibiting any special refinement of taste, are rich and massive.

The venetian blinds are down and the room is in semi-darkness. What light there is proceeds from the bright sunshine visible through the slats.

Seated about the room, as if waiting for somebody to arrive, are JAMES *and* ANN MORTIMORE, STEPHEN *and* LOUISA, THADDEUS *and* PHYLLIS, *and* COLONEL PONTING *and* ROSE. *The ladies are wearing their hats and gloves. Everybody is in the sort of black which people hurriedly muster while regular mourning is in the making—in the case of the* MORTIMORES, *the black being added to apparel of a less sombre kind. All speak in subdued voices.*

[NOTE:—*Throughout, "right" and "left" are the spectators' right and left, not the actor's.*]

ROSE.

[*A lady of forty-four, fashionably dressed and coiffured and with a suspiciously blooming complexion—on the settee on the left, fanning herself.*] Oh, the heat! I'm stifled.

LOUISA.

[*On the right—forty-six, a spare, thin-voiced woman.*] Mayn't we have a window open?

ANN.

[*Beside the writing-table—a stolid, corpulent woman of fifty.*] I don't think we *ought* to have a window open.

JAMES.

[*At the writing-table—a burly, thick-set man, a little older than his wife, with iron-gray hair and beard and a crape band round his sleeve.*] Phew! Why not, mother?

ANN.

It isn't usual in a house of mourning—except in the room where the——

PONTING.

[*In the armchair before the fireplace—fifty-five, short, stout, apoplectic.*] Rubbish! [*Dabbing his brow.*] I beg your pardon—it's like the Black Hole of Calcutta.

THADDEUS.

[*Rising from the settee on the right, where he is sitting with* PHYLLIS—*a meek, care-worn man of two-and-forty.*] Shall I open one a little way?

STEPHEN.

[*On the further side of the library-table—forty-nine, bald, stooping, with red rims to his eyes, wearing spectacles.*] Do, Tad.

[THADDEUS *goes to the window on the right and opens it.*

THADDEUS.

[*From behind the venetian blind.*] Here's a fly.

JAMES.

[*Taking out his watch as he rises.*] That'll be Crake. Half-past eleven. He's in good time.

THADDEUS.

[*Looking into the street.*] It isn't Crake. It's a young fellow.

JAMES.

Young fellow?

THADDEUS.

[*Emerging.*] It's Crake's partner.

JAMES.

His partner?

STEPHEN.

Crake has sent Vallance.

JAMES.

What's he done that for? Why hasn't he come himself? This young man doesn't know anything about our family.

ANN.

He'll know the law, James.

JAMES.

Oh, the law's clear enough, mother.

[*After a short silence* HEATH, *a middle-aged man-servant, appears, followed by* VALLANCE. VALLANCE *is a young man of about five-and-thirty.*

HEATH.

Mr. Vallance.

JAMES.

[*Advancing to* VALLANCE *as* HEATH *retires.*] Good-morning.

VALLANCE.

Good-morning. [*Inquiringly.*] Mr. Mortimore?

JAMES.

James Mortimore.

VALLANCE.

Mr. Crake had your telegram yesterday evening.

JAMES.

Yes, he answered it, telling us to expect him.

VALLANCE.

He's obliged to go to London on business. He's very sorry. He thought I'd better run through.

JAMES.

Oh, well—glad to see you. [*Introducing the others.*] My wife. My sister Rose—Mrs. Ponting. My sister-in-law, Mrs. Stephen Mortimore. My sister-in-law, Mrs. Thaddeus. My brother Stephen.

STEPHEN.

[*Rising.*] Mr. Vallance was pointed out to me at the Institute the other night. [*Shaking hands with* VALLANCE.] You left by the eight forty-seven?

VALLANCE.

Yes. I changed at Mirtlesfield.

JAMES.

Colonel Ponting—my brother-in-law. [PONTING, *who has risen, nods to* VALLANCE *and joins* ROSE.] My younger brother, Thaddeus.

THADDEUS.

[*Who has moved away to the left.*] How d'ye do?

JAMES.

[*Putting* VALLANCE *into the chair before the writing-table and switching on the light of the lamp.*] You sit yourself down there. [*To everybody.*] Who's to be spokesman?

STEPHEN.

[*Joining* LOUISA.] Oh, you explain matters, Jim.

[LOUISA *makes way for* STEPHEN, *transferring herself to another chair so that her husband may be nearer* VALLANCE.

JAMES.

[*To* PONTING.] Colonel?

PONTING.

[*Sitting by* ROSE.] Certainly; you do the talking, Mortimore.

JAMES.

[*Sitting, in the middle of the room, astride a chair, which he fetches from the window on the right.*] Well, Mr. Vallance, the reason we wired you yesterday—wired Mr. Crake, rather—asking him to meet us here this morning, is this. Something has happened here in Linchpool which makes it necessary for us to obtain a little legal assistance.

VALLANCE.

Yes?

JAMES.

Not that we anticipate legal difficulties, whichever way the affair shapes. At the same time, we consider it advisable that we should be represented by our own solicitor—a solicitor who has our interests at heart, and nobody's interests but ours. [*Looking round.*] Isn't that it?

STEPHEN.

We want our interests watched—our interests exclusively.

PONTING.

Watched—that's it. I'm speaking for my wife, of course.

ROSE.

[*With a languid drawl.*] Yes, watched. We should like our interests watched.

JAMES.

[*To* VALLANCE.] These are the facts. I'll start with a bit of history. We Mortimores are one of the oldest, and, I'm bold enough to say, one of the most respected, families in Singlehampton. You're a newcomer to the town; so I'm obliged to tell you things I shouldn't have to tell Crake, who's been the family's solicitor for years. Four generations of Mortimores—I'm not counting our youngsters, who make a fifth—four generations of Mortimores have been born in Singlehampton, and the majority of 'em have earned their daily bread there.

VALLANCE.

Indeed?

JAMES.

Yes, sir, indeed. Now, then. [*Pointing to the writing-table.*] Writing-paper's in the middle drawer. [VALLANCE *takes a sheet of paper from the drawer and arranges it before him.*] My dear father and mother—both passed away—had five children, four sons and a daughter. I'm the second son; then comes Stephen; then Rose—Mrs. Colonel Ponting; then Thaddeus. You see us all round you.

VALLANCE.

[*Selecting a pen.*] Five children, you said?

JAMES.

Five. The eldest of us was Ned—Edward——

STEPHEN.

Edward Thomas Mortimore.

JAMES.

Edward cut himself adrift from Singlehampton six-and-twenty years ago. He died at a quarter-past three yesterday morning.

STEPHEN.

Up-stairs.

JAMES.

We're in his house.

STEPHEN.

We lay him to rest in the cemetery here on Monday.

VALLANCE.

[*Sympathetically.*] I was reading in the train, in one of the Linchpool papers——

JAMES.

Oh, they've got it in all their papers.

VALLANCE.

Mr. Mortimore, the brewer?

JAMES.

The same. Aye, he was a big man in Linchpool.

STEPHEN.

A very big man.

JAMES.

And, what's more, a very wealthy one; there's no doubt about that. Well, we can't find a will, Mr. Vallance.

VALLANCE.

Really?

JAMES.

To all appearances, my brother's left no will—died intestate.

VALLANCE.

Unmarried?

JAMES.

Unmarried; a bachelor. Now, then, sir—just to satisfy my good lady—in the event of no will cropping up, what becomes of my poor brother's property?

VALLANCE.

It depends upon what the estate consists of. As much of it as is real estate would go to the heir-at-law—in this instance, the eldest surviving brother.

PONTING.

[*Impatiently.*] Yes, yes; but it's all personal estate—personal estate, every bit of it.

JAMES.

[*To* VALLANCE.] The Colonel's right. It's personal estate entirely, so we gather. The Colonel and I were pumping Elkin's managing-clerk about it this morning.

VALLANCE.

Elkin?

JAMES.

Elkin, Son and Tullis.

STEPHEN.

Mr. Elkin has acted as my poor brother's solicitor for the last fifteen years.

JAMES.

And *he's* never made a will for Ned.

STEPHEN.

Nor heard my brother mention the existence of one.

JAMES.

[*To* VALLANCE.] Well? In the case of personal estate——?

VALLANCE.

In that case, equal division between next-of-kin.

JAMES.

That's us—me, and my brothers, and my sister?

VALLANCE.

Yes.

JAMES.

[*To* ANN.] What did I tell you, Ann? [*To the rest.*] What did I tell everybody?

[STEPHEN *polishes his spectacles, and* PONTING *pulls at his moustache, vigorously.* ROSE, ANN, *and* LOUISA *resettle themselves in their seats with great contentment.*

VALLANCE.

[*Writing.*] "Edward" — [*looking up*] Thomas? [JAMES *nods.*] "Thomas—Mortimore——"

JAMES.

Of 3 Cannon Row and Horton Lane——

STEPHEN.

Horton Lane is where the brewery is.

JAMES.

Linchpool, brewer.

STEPHEN.

"Gentleman" is the more correct description. The business was converted into a company in nineteen-hundred-and-four.

LOUISA.

Gentleman, ah! What a gentlemanly man he was!

ANN.

A perfect gentleman in every respect.

ROSE.

Most gentlemanlike, poor dear thing.

PONTING.

Must have been. I never saw him—but must have been.

JAMES.

[*To* VALLANCE.] Gentleman, deceased——

STEPHEN.

Died, June the twentieth——

JAMES.

Aged fifty-three. Two years my senior.

VALLANCE.

[*With due mournfulness.*] No older? [*Writing.*] You are James——

JAMES.

James Henry. "Ivanhoe," Claybrook Road, and Victoria Yard Singlehampton, builder and contractor.

ANN.

My husband is a parish guardian and a rural-district councilman.

JAMES.

Never mind that, mother.

ANN.

Eight years treasurer of the Institute, and one of the founders of the Singlehampton and Claybrook Temperance League.

LOUISA.

Stephen was one of the founders of the League too—weren't you, Stephen?

JAMES.

[*To* VALLANCE.] Stephen Philip Mortimore, 11 The Crescent, and 32 King Street, Singlehampton, printer and publisher; editor and proprietor of our Singlehampton *Times and Mirror.*

LOUISA.

Author of the History of Singlehampton and its Surroundings——

STEPHEN.

All right, Lou.

LOUISA.

With Ordnance Map.

JAMES.

Rose Emily Rackstraw Ponting——

ROSE.

My mother was a Rackstraw.

JAMES.

Wife of Arthur Everard Ponting, West Sussex Regiment, Colonel, retired, 17*a* Coningsby Place, South Belgravia, London. That's the lot.

ANN.

No——

JAMES.

Oh, there's Tad. [*To* VALLANCE.] Thaddeus John Mortimore——

THADDEUS.

[*Who is standing, looking on, with his elbows resting upon the back of the chair before the fireplace—smiling diffidently.*] Don't forget me, Jim.

JAMES.

6 Nelson Villas, Singlehampton, professor of music. Any further particulars, Mr. Vallance?

VALLANCE.

[*Finishing writing and leaning back in his chair.*] May I ask, Mr. Mortimore, what terms you and your sister and brothers were on with the late Mr. Mortimore?

JAMES.

Terms?

VALLANCE.

What I mean is, your late brother was a man of more than ordinary intelligence; he must have known who his estate would benefit, in the event of his dying intestate.

JAMES.

[*With a nod.*] Aye.

VALLANCE.

My point is, was he on such terms with you as to make it reasonably probable that he should have desired his estate to pass to those who are here?

JAMES.

[*Rubbing his beard.*] Reasonably probable?

STEPHEN.

Certainly.

PONTING.

In my opinion, certainly.

JAMES.

[*Looking at the others.*] He sent for us when he was near his end——

STEPHEN.

Showing that old sores were healed—thoroughly healed —as far as he was concerned.

VALLANCE.

Old sores?

JAMES.

He wouldn't have done that if he hadn't had a fondness for his family—eh?

ANN.

Of course not.

LOUISA.

Of course he wouldn't

PONTING.

Quite so.

VALLANCE.

Then, I take it, there had been—er——?

STEPHEN.

An estrangement. Yes, there *had*.

JAMES.

Oh, I'm not one for keeping anything in the background. Up to a day or two before his death, we hadn't been on what you'd call terms with my brother for many years, Mr. Vallance.

STEPHEN.

Unhappily.

JAMES.

De mortuis—how's it go——?

STEPHEN.

De mortuis nil nisi bonum.

JAMES.

Well, plain English is good enough for me. [*To* VALLANCE.] But I don't attempt to deny it—at one time of his life my poor brother Edward was a bit of a scamp, sir.

STEPHEN.

A little rackety—a little wild. Young men will be young men.

ANN.

[*Shaking her head.*] I've a grown-up son myself.

LOUISA.

[*Inconsequently.*] And there are two sides to every question. I always say—don't I, Stephen——?

STEPHEN.

Yes, yes, yes.

LOUISA.

There are two sides to every question.

JAMES.

[*To* VALLANCE.] No, sir, after Edward cleared out of Singlehampton, we didn't see him again, any of us, till about fifteen years back. Then he came to settle here, in this city, and bought Cordingly's brewery.

LOUISA.

Only forty miles away from his birthplace.

STEPHEN.

Forty-two miles.

LOUISA.

That was fate.

STEPHEN.

Chance.

LOUISA.

I don't know the difference between chance and fate.

STEPHEN.

[*Irritably.*] No, you don't, Lou.

JAMES.

Then some of us used to knock up against him occasionally —generally on the line, at Mirtlesfield junction. But it was

only a nod, or a how-d'ye-do, we got from him; and it never struck us till last Tuesday morning that he kept a soft corner in his heart for us all.

VALLANCE.

Tuesday——?

ANN.

First post.

JAMES.

We had a letter from Elkin, telling us that poor Ned was seriously ill; and saying that he was willing to shake hands with the principal members of the family, if they chose to come through to Linchpool.

STEPHEN.

Thank God we came.

JAMES.

Aye, thank God.

ANN *and* LOUISA.

Thank God.

ROSE.

[*Affectedly.*] It will always be a sorrow to me that I didn't get down till it was too late. I shall never cease to reproach myself.

JAMES.

[*Indulgently.*] Oh, well, you're a woman o' fashion, Rose.

ROSE.

[*With a simper.*] Still, if I had guessed the end was as near as it was, I'd have given up my social engagements without a murmur. [*Appealing to* PONTING.] Toby——!

PONTING.

Without a murmur—without a murmur; both of us would.

VALLANCE.

[*Rising, putting his notes into his pocketbook as he speaks.*] I think it would perhaps be as well that I should meet Mr. Elkin.

STEPHEN.

That's the plan.

JAMES.

[*Rising.*] Just what I was going to propose.

STEPHEN.

Elkin knows we have communicated with our solicitor.

JAMES.

[*Looking at his watch.*] He's gone round to the Safe Deposit Company in Lemon Street.

STEPHEN.

His latest idea is that my brother may have rented a safe there.

PONTING.

[*Who has risen with* JAMES.] Preposterous. Never heard anything more grotesque.

JAMES.

The old gentleman will want to drag the river Linch next.

PONTING.

As if a man of wealth and position, with safes and strong-rooms of his own, would deposit his will in a place of that sort. 'Pon my word, it's outrageous of Elkin.

STEPHEN.

It does seem rather extravagant.

ROSE.

Absurd.

VALLANCE.

[*Coming forward.*] We must remember that it's the duty of all concerned to use every possible means of discovery. [*To* JAMES.] Your brother had an office at the brewery?

JAMES.

Elkin and I turned that inside-out yesterday.

STEPHEN.

In the presence of Mr. Holt and Mr. Friswell, two of the directors.

VALLANCE.

And his bank——?

JAMES.

London City and Midland. Four tin boxes. We've been through 'em.

STEPHEN.

The most likely place of deposit, I should have thought, was the safe in this room.

PONTING.

Exactly. The will would have been there if there had been a will at all.

[JAMES *switches on the light of the lamp which stands above the cupboard at the further end of the dwarf-bookcase.*

JAMES.

[*Opening the cupboard and revealing a safe.*] Yes, this is where my brother's private papers are.

STEPHEN.

This was his library and sanctum.

JAMES.

[*Listening as he shuts the cupboard door.*] Hallo! [*Opening the room door a few inches and peering into the hall.*] Here *is* Elkin. [*There is a slight general movement*

denoting intense interest and suspense. ANN *gets to her feet.* JAMES *closes the door and comes foward a little—grimly.*] Well! Hey! I wonder whether he's found anything in Lemon Street?

PONTING.

[*Clutching* ROSE's *shoulder and dropping back into his chair—under his breath.*] Good God!

ANN.

[*Staring at her husband.*] James——!

JAMES.

[*Sternly.*] Go and sit down, mother. [ANN *retreats and seats herself beside* ROSE.] If he *has,* we ought to feel glad; that's how we ought to feel.

STEPHEN.

[*Resentfully.*] Of course we ought. That's how we *shall* feel.

JAMES.

Poor old Ned! It's his wishes we've got to consider—[*returning to the door*] his wishes. [*Opening the door again.*] Come in, Mr. Elkin. Waiting for you, sir. [*He admits* ELKIN, *a gray-haired, elderly man of sixty. Presents* VALLANCE.] Mr. Vallance—Crake and Vallance, Singlehampton, our solicitors. [ELKIN *advances and shakes hands with* VALLANCE.] Mr. Vallance has just run over to see how we're getting on.

ELKIN.

[*To* VALLANCE, *genially.*] I don't go often to Singlehampton nowadays. I recollect the time, Mr. Vallance, when the whole of the south side of the town was meadow-land. Would you believe it—meadow-land! And where they've built the new hospital, old Dicky Dunn, the farmer, used to graze his cattle. [*To* JAMES, *who is touching his sleeve.*] Eh?

JAMES.

[*Rather huskily.*] Excuse me. Any luck?

ELKIN.

Luck?

JAMES.

In Lemon Street. Find anything?

ELKIN.

[*Shaking his head.*] No. There is nothing there in your brother's name. [*Again there is a general movement, but this time of relief.*] It was worth trying.

JAMES.

Oh, it was worth trying.

STEPHEN.

[*Heartily.*] Everything's worth trying.

PONTING.

[*Jumping up.*] Everything. Mustn't leave a stone unturned.

[*The strain being over,* ROSE *and* ANN *rise and go to the fireplace, where* PONTING *joins them.* THADDEUS *moves away and seats himself at the centre window.*

ELKIN.

[*Sitting beside the writing-table.*] This is a puzzling state of affairs, Mr. Vallance.

VALLANCE.

Oh, come, Mr. Elkin!

ELKIN.

I don't want to appear uncivil to these ladies and gentlemen—very puzzling.

VALLANCE.

Scarcely what one would have expected, perhaps; but what is there that's puzzling about it?

JAMES.

[*Standing by* ELKIN.] People have died intestate before to-day, Mr. Elkin.

STEPHEN.

It's a common enough occurrence.

VALLANCE.

[*To* ELKIN.] I understand you acted for the late Mr. Mortimore for a great many years?

ELKIN.

Ever since he came to Linchpool.

VALLANCE.

His most prosperous years.

[ELKIN *assents silently.*

JAMES.

When he was making money to *leave.*

VALLANCE.

[*To* ELKIN.] And the subject of a will was never broached between you?

ELKIN.

I won't say that. I've thrown out a hint or two at different times.

VALLANCE.

Without any response on his part?

ELKIN.

Without any practical response, I admit. [JAMES *and* STEPHEN *shrug their shoulders.*] But he must have employed other solicitors previous to my connection with him. I can't trace his having done so; but no commercial man gets to eight-and-thirty without having something to do with us chaps.

VALLANCE.

[*Sitting on the settee on the left.*] Assuming a will of long standing, he may have destroyed it, may he not, recently?

ELKIN.

Recently?

VALLANCE.

Quite recently. Here we have a man at variance with his family and dangerously ill. What do we find him doing? We find him summoning his relatives to his bedside and becoming reconciled to them——

JAMES.

Completely reconciled.

STEPHEN.

Completely.

ELKIN.

[*To* VALLANCE.] At my persuasion. I put pressure on him to send for his belongings.

VALLANCE.

Indeed? Granting that, isn't it reasonable to suppose that subsequent to this reconciliation——?

ELKIN.

Oh, no: he destroyed no document of any description after he took to his bed. That I've ascertained.

VALLANCE.

Well, theorizing is of no use, is it? We have to deal with the simple fact, Mr. Elkin.

JAMES.

Yes, that's all we have to deal with.

STEPHEN.

The simple fact.

ELKIN.

No will.

PONTING.

[*Who, with the rest, has been following the conversation between* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE.] No will.

ELKIN.

[*After a pause.*] Do you know, Mr. Vallance, there is one thing I shouldn't have been unprepared for?

VALLANCE.

What?

ELKIN.

A will drawn by another solicitor, behind my back, *during* my association with Mr. Mortimore.

VALLANCE.

Behind your back?

ELKIN.

He was a most attractive creature—one of the most engaging and one of the ablest, I've ever come across; but he was remarkably secretive with me in matters relating to his private affairs—remarkably secretive.

VALLANCE.

Secretive?

ELKIN.

Reserved, if you like. Why, it wasn't till a few days before his death—last Saturday—it wasn't till last Saturday that he first spoke to me about this child of his.

VALLANCE.

Child?

ELKIN.

This young lady we are going to see presently.

VALLANCE.

[*Looking at* JAMES *and* STEPHEN.] Oh, I—I haven't heard anything of her.

ELKIN.

Bless me, haven't you been told?

JAMES.

[*Uncomfortably.*] We hadn't got as far as that with Mr. Vallance.

STEPHEN.

[*Clearing his throat.*] Mr. Elkin did not think fit to inform *us* of her existence till yesterday.

JAMES.

[*Looking at his watch.*] Twelve o'clock she's due, isn't she?

ELKIN.

[*To* JAMES.] You fixed the hour. [*To* VALLANCE.] I wrote to her at the same time that I communicated with his brothers. Unfortunately she was away, visiting.

STEPHEN.

She's studying painting at one of these art-schools in Paris.

ELKIN.

She arrived late last night. Mrs. Elkin and I received her. Only four-and-twenty. A nice girl.

VALLANCE.

Is the mother living?

ELKIN.

No.

JAMES.

The mother was a person of the name of Thornhill.

STEPHEN.

Calling herself Thornhill—some woman in London. She died when the child was quite small.

JAMES.

[*With a jerk of the head towards the safe.*] There's a bundle of the mother's letters in the safe.

ELKIN.

This meeting with the family is my arranging. As matters stand, Miss Thornhill is absolutely unprovided for, Mr. Vallance. And there was the utmost affection between Mr. Mortimore and his daughter—as he acknowledged her to be —undoubtedly. Now you won't grumble at me for my use of the word "puzzling"?

VALLANCE.

[*Looking round.*] I am sure my clients, should the responsibility ultimately rest with them, will do what is just and fitting with regard to the young lady.

JAMES.

More than just—more than just, if it's left to me.

STEPHEN.

We should be only too anxious to behave in a liberal manner, Mr. Vallance.

LOUISA.

We're parents ourselves—all except Colonel and Mrs. Ponting.

ANN.

My own girl—my Cissy—is nearly four-and-twenty.

ROSE.

[*Seated upon the fender-stool.*] I suppose we should have to make her an allowance of sorts, shouldn't we?

JAMES.

A monthly allowance.

STEPHEN.

Monthly or quarterly.

PONTING.

Yes, but this art-school in Paris—you've no conception what that kind of fun runs into.

JAMES.

Schooling doesn't go on forever, Colonel.

PONTING.

But it'll lead to an *atelier*—a studio—if you're not careful.

ROSE.

The art-school could be dropped, surely?

STEPHEN.

Perhaps the art-school isn't strictly necessary.

ROSE.

And she has an address in a most expensive quarter of Paris—didn't you say, Jim?

JAMES.

The Colonel says it's a swell locality.

PONTING.

Most expensive. The father—if he *was* her father—seems to have squandered money on her.

STEPHEN.

Well, well, we shall see what's to be done.

PONTING.

Squandered money on her recklessly.

JAMES.

Yes, yes, we'll see, Colonel; we'll see.

[PHYLLIS, *who has taken no part in what has been going on, suddenly rises. She is a woman of thirty-*

five, white-faced and faded, but with decided traces of beauty. Everybody looks at her in surprise.

PHYLLIS.

[*Falteringly.*] I—I beg your pardon——

LOUISA.

[*Startled.*] Good gracious me, Phyllis!

PHYLLIS.

[*Gaining firmness as she proceeds.*] I beg your pardon. With every respect for Rose and Colonel Ponting, if we come into Edward Mortimore's money, we mustn't let it make an atom of difference to the child.

LOUISA.

Really, Phyllis!

STEPHEN.

[*Stiffly.*] My dear Phyllis——

JAMES.

[*Half amused, half contemptuously.*] Oh, we mustn't, mustn't we, Phyllis?

PHYLLIS.

He was awfully devoted to her in his lifetime, it turns out. Colonel Ponting and Rose ought to remember that.

PONTING.

[*Walking away in umbrage to the window on the left, followed by* ROSE.] Thank you, Mrs. Thaddeus.

THADDEUS.

[*Who has risen and come to the writing-table.*] Phyl—Phyl——

PHYLLIS.

[*To* JAMES *and* STEPHEN.] Jim—Stephen—you couldn't stint the girl after pocketing your brother's money; you couldn't do it!

ANN.

James——

JAMES.

Eh, mother?

ANN.

I don't think we need to be taught our duty by Phyllis.

STEPHEN.

[*Rising and going over to the fireplace.*] Frankly, I don't think we need.

LOUISA.

[*Following him.*] Before Mr. Elkin and Mr. Vallance!

THADDEUS.

Stephen—Lou—you don't understand Phyl.

JAMES.

It isn't for want of plain speaking, Tad.

THADDEUS.

[*Sitting at the writing-table.*] No, but listen—Jim——

JAMES.

[*Joining those at the fireplace.*] Blessed if I've ever been spoken to in this style in my life!

THADDEUS.

Jim, listen. If we come into Ned's money, we come into his debts into the bargain. There are no assets without liabilities. The girl's a debt—a big debt, as it were. Well, what does she cost? Five hundred a year? Six—seven —eight hundred a year? What's it matter? What would a thousand a year matter? Whatever Ned could afford, *we* could, amongst us. Why he should have neglected to make Miss Thornhill independent is a mystery—I'm with you there, Mr. Elkin. Perhaps his sending for us, and shaking hands with us as he did, was his way of giving her into our charge. Heaven knows what was in his mind. But this is certain—if it falls to our lot to administer to Ned's estate, we administer, not only to the money, but to the girl, and the art-school, and her comfortable lodgings, and anything else in reason. There's nothing offensive in our saying this.

ELKIN.

Not in the least.

THADDEUS.

[*With a deprecating little laugh.*] Ha! We don't often put our oar into family discussions, Phyl and I. Stephen— [*turning in his chair*] Rosie——

JAMES.

[*Looking down on* THADDEUS—*grinning.*] Hallo, Tad! Why, I've always had the credit of being the speaker o' the family. You're developing all of a sudden.

[HEATH *enters.*

HEATH.

[*Looking round the room.*] Mrs. Thaddeus Mortimore——?

THADDEUS.

[*Pointing to* PHYLLIS *who is now seated in a chair on the right.*] Here she is.

HEATH.

[*In a hushed voice.*] Two young ladies from Roper's to fit Mrs. Thaddeus Mortimore with her mourning.

THADDEUS.

[*Rising.*] They weren't ready for Phyllis at ten o'clock. [*Over his shoulder, as he joins* PHYLLIS *at the door.*] Hope you don't object to their waiting on her here.

HEATH.

[*To* THADDEUS.] On the first floor, sir.

[PHYLLIS *and* THADDEUS *go out.* HEATH *is following them.*

VALLANCE.

[*To* HEATH, *rising.*] Er—— [*To* ELKIN.] What's his name?

ELKIN.

[*Calling to* HEATH, *who returns.*] Heath——

VALLANCE.

[*Going to* HEATH.] Have you a room where Mr. Elkin and I can be alone for a few minutes?

HEATH.

There's the dining-room, sir.

VALLANCE.

[*Turning to* ELKIN.] Shall we have a little talk together?

ELKIN.

[*Rising.*] By all means.

VALLANCE.

[*To the others.*] Will you excuse us?

ELKIN.

[*Taking* VALLANCE'S *arm.*] Come along. [*Passing out with* VALLANCE—*regretfully.*] Ah, Heath, the dining-room——!

HEATH.

[*As he disappears, closing the door.*] Yes, Mr. Elkin; that's over, sir.

JAMES.

[*Who has crossed over to the right, to watch the withdrawal of* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE.] What have those two got to say to each other on the quiet in such a deuce of a hurry?

PONTING.

[*Coming forward.*] My dear good friends, I beg you won't think me too presuming——

JAMES.

[*Sourly.*] What is it, Colonel?

PONTING.

But you mustn't, you really mustn't, allow yourselves to be dictated to—bullied——

JAMES.

Bullied?

PONTING.

Into doing anything that isn't perfectly agreeable to you.

STEPHEN.

You consider we're being bullied, Colonel?

JAMES.

If it comes to bullying——

PONTING.

It *has* come to bullying, if I'm any judge of bullying. First, you have Mr. Elkin, a meddlesome, obstructive——

STEPHEN.

[*Sitting at the writing-table.*] Oh, he's obviously antagonistic to us—obviously.

PONTING.

Of course he is. He sniffs a little job of work over this Miss Thornhill. It's his policy to cram Miss Thornhill down our throats. That's his game.

JAMES.

[*Between his teeth.*] By George——!

PONTING.

And then you get Mr. Vallance, your own lawyer——

JAMES.

[*Sitting in a chair on the right.*] Aye, I'm a bit disappointed with Vallance.

PONTING.

Dogmatizing about what is just and what is fitting——

STEPHEN.

Hear, hear, Colonel! You don't pay a solicitor to take sides against you.

JAMES.

As if we couldn't be trusted to do the fair thing of our own accord!

PONTING.

The upshot being that Miss Thornhill, supported openly by the one, and tacitly by the other, will be marching in here and—and——

JAMES.

Kicking up a rumpus.

PONTING.

I shouldn't be surprised.

LOUISA.

A rumpus! [*Sitting upon the settee on the left.*] She wouldn't dare.

ANN.

[*Rising.*] That would be terrible—a rumpus——

ROSE.

[*In the middle of the room.*] I shouldn't be surprised either. You mustn't expect too much, you know, from a girl who's——

STEPHEN.

[*Interpreting* ROSE's *shrug.*] Illegitimate.

ANN.

No, I suppose we oughtn't to expect her to be the same as our children.

PONTING.

And finally, to cap it all, you have your brother Thaddeus —your brother——

JAMES.

Ha, yes! Tad obliged us with a pretty stiff lecture, didn't he?

LOUISA.

So did Phyllis.

ANN.

[*Seating herself beside* LOUISA.] It was Phyllis who began it.

ROSE.

[*Swaying herself to and fro upon the back of the chair next to the writing-table.*] Tad's wife! She's a suitable person to be lectured by, I must say.

STEPHEN.

Poor old Tad! He was only trying to excuse her rudeness.

ROSE.

Just fancy! The two Tads sharing equally with ourselves!

STEPHEN.

It *is* curious, at first sight.

ROSE.

Extraordinary.

STEPHEN.

But, naturally, the law makes no distinctions.

ROSE.

No. It was the lady's method of announcing that she's as good as we are.

JAMES.

Tad and his wife with forty or fifty thousand pound, p'r'aps, to play with! So the world wags.

ROSE.

Positively maddening.

LOUISA.

We shall see Phyllis aping us now more than ever.

ANN.

And making that boy and girl of hers still more conceited.

LOUISA.

They needn't let apartments anv longer; that's a mercy.

ANN.

We shall be spared that disgrace.

JAMES.

Strong language, mother!

STEPHEN.

Hardly disgrace. You can't call the curate of their parish church a lodger in the ordinary sense of the term.

LOUISA.

Phyllis's girl might make a match of it with Mr. Trist in a couple of years' time. She's fifteen.

ANN.

A forward fifteen.

ROSE.

It's a fairy story. A woman who's brought nothing but the worst of luck to Tad from the day he married her!

JAMES.

The devil's luck.

STEPHEN.

Been his ruin—his ruin professionally—without the shadow of a doubt.

LOUISA.

Such a good-looking fellow he used to be, too.

ANN.

Handsome.

LOUISA.

[*Archly.*] It was Tad I fell in love with, Stephen—not with you.

STEPHEN.

And popular. *He'd* have had the conductorship of the choral societies but for his mistake; Rawlinson would never have had it. Councillor Pritchard admitted as much at a committee-meeting.

PONTING.

[*Seated upon the settee on the right.*] Butcher—the wife's father—wasn't he?

ROSE.

Just as bad. Old Burdock kept a grocer's shop at the corner of East Street.

STEPHEN.

West Street.

ROSE.

West Street, was it? She's the common or garden over-educated petty-tradesman's daughter.

JAMES.

[*Oratorically.*] No, no; you can't *over*educate, Rose. You can *wrongly* educate——

ROSE.

Oh, don't start that, Jim. [*To* PONTING.] She was a pupil of Tad's.

STEPHEN.

[*Holding up his hands.*] Marriage—marriage——!

LOUISA.

Stephen!

JAMES.

If it isn't the right sort o' marriage——!

STEPHEN.

Poor old Tad!

JAMES.

Rich old Tad to-day, though! [*Chuckling.*] Ha, ha!

ROSE.

[*Glancing at the door.*] Sssh——!

[THADDEUS *returns. The others look down their noses or at distant objects.*

THADDEUS.

[*Closing the door and advancing.*] I—I hope you're not angry with Phyllis.

STEPHEN.

[*Resignedly.*] Angry?

THADDEUS.

Or with me.

ANN.

Anger would be out of place in a house of mourning.

JAMES.

Women's tongues, Tad!

STEPHEN.

Yes; the ladies—they will make mischief.

LOUISA.

Not every woman, Stephen.

THADDEUS.

Phyllis hasn't the slightest desire to make mischief. Why on earth should Phyl want to make mischief? [*Sitting in*

the chair in the middle of the room.] She's a little nervy —a little unstrung; that's what's the matter with Phyllis.

LOUISA.

There's no cause for *her* to be specially upset that I can think of.

ANN.

She didn't know Edward in the old days as we did.

THADDEUS.

No, but being with him on Wednesday night, when the change came—that's affected her very deeply, poor girl; bowled her over. [*To* ROSE.] She helped to nurse him.

ROSE.

[*Indifferently.*] One of the nurses cracked up, didn't she?

JAMES.

The night-nurse.

THADDEUS.

[*Nodding.*] Sent word late on Wednesday afternoon that she couldn't attend to her duties.

STEPHEN.

The day-nurse knocking off at eight o'clock! Dreadful!

THADDEUS.

There we were, rushing about all over the place—all over the place—to find a substitute.

JAMES.

And no success.

THADDEUS.

[*Rubbing his knees.*] There's where Phyllis came in handy; there's where Phyl came in handy.

LOUISA.

Phyllis hadn't more than two or three hours of it, while Ann and I were resting, when all's said and done.

ANN.

Not more than two or three hours alone, at the outside.

THADDEUS.

No; but, as I say, it was during those two or three hours that the change set in. It's been a shock to her.

LOUISA.

The truth is, Phyllis delights in making a fuss, Tad.

THADDEUS.

Phyl!

ANN.

She loves to make a martyr of herself.

THADDEUS.

Phyl does!

LOUISA.

You delight to make a martyr of her, then; perhaps that's it.

ANN.

I suppose you do it to hide her faults.

LOUISA.

It would be far more sensible of you, Tad, to strive to correct them——

ANN.

If it's not too late—far more sensible.

LOUISA.

And teach her a different system of managing her home——

ANN.

And how to bring up her children more in keeping with their position——

LOUISA.

With less pride and display.

ANN.

They treat their *cousins* precisely like dirt.

LOUISA.

Dirt under the foot.

ANN.

Why Phyllis can't be satisfied with a cook-general passes my comprehension——

ROSE.

[*Wearily.*] Oh, shut up!

JAMES.

Steady, mother!

THADDEUS.

[*Looking at them all.*] Ah, you've never liked Phyllis from the beginning, any of you.

LOUISA.

Never liked her!

THADDEUS.

Never cottoned to her, never appreciated her. Oh, I know—old Mr. Burdock's shop! [*Simply.*] Well, Ann; well, Lou; shop or no shop, there's no better wife—no better woman—breathing than Phyl.

LOUISA.

One may like a person without being blind to shortcomings.

ANN.

Nobody's flawless—nobody.

LOUISA.

There are two sides to every person as well as to every question, I always maintain.

THADDEUS.

However, maybe it won't matter so much in the future. It hasn't made things easier for us in the past. [*Snapping his fingers softly.*] But now——

STEPHEN.

[*Caustically.*] Henceforth you and your wife will be above the critical opinion of others, eh, Tad?

JAMES.

Aye, Tad's come into money now. Mind what you're at, mother! Be careful, Lou! Tad's come into money.

THADDEUS.

[*In a quiet voice, but clenching his hands tightly.*] My God, I hope I have! I'm not a hypocrite, Jim. My God, I hope I have!

[*The door opens and* ELKIN *appears.*

ELKIN.

Miss Thornhill is here. [*There is a general movement.* THADDEUS *walks away to the fireplace.* JAMES, STEPHEN, *and* PONTING *also rise and* ROSE *joins* PONTING *at the library-table.* ANN *and* LOUISA *shake out their skirts formidably, their husbands taking up a position near them.* HELEN THORNHILL *enters, followed by* VALLANCE, *who closes the door.* ELKIN *presents* HELEN.] Miss Thornhill. [*To* HELEN, *pointing to the group on the left.*] These gentlemen are the late Mr. Mortimore's brothers. [*Pointing to* ROSE.] His sister.

HELEN.

[*A graceful, brilliant-looking girl with perfectly refined manners, wearing an elegant traveling-dress—almost inaudibly.*] Oh, yes.

ELKIN.

[*With a wave of the hand towards the others.*] Members of the family by marriage.

[*She sits, at* ELKIN'S *invitation, in the chair beside the writing-table. The attitude of the* JAMES *and* STEPHEN MORTIMORES, *and of the* PONTINGS, *undergoes a marked change.*

JAMES.

[*After a pause, advancing a step or two.*] I'm the eldest brother. [*Awkwardly.*] James, I am.

STEPHEN.

[*Drawing attention to himself by an uneasy cough.*] Stephen.

ANN.

[*Humbly.*] I'm Mrs. James.

LOUISA.

[*In the same tone.*] Mrs. Stephen

ROSE.

[*Seating herself on the left of the library-table.*] Rose—Mrs. Ponting. [*Glancing at* PONTING.] My husband.

THADDEUS.

[*Now standing behind the writing-table.*] Thaddeus. My wife is up-stairs, trying on her——

[*He checks himself and retreats, again sitting at the centre window.*

JAMES.

[*Seating himself at the writing-table.*] Tired, I dessay?

HELEN.

[*Who has received the various announcements with a dignified inclination of the head.*] A little.

STEPHEN.

[*Bringing forward the armchair from the fireplace.*] You weren't in Paris, Mr. Elkin tells us, when his letter——?

HELEN.

No; I was nearly a nine hours' journey from Paris, staying with friends at St. Etienne.

ROSE.

A pity.

LOUISA.

Great pity.

HELEN.

Mr. Elkin's letter was re-posted and reached me on Wednesday. I got back to Paris that night.

ELKIN.

[*Seating himself beside her.*] And had a hard day's traveling again yesterday.

STEPHEN.

[*Sitting in the armchair.*] She must be worn out.

ANN.

Indeed she must.

PONTING.

[*Sitting by* ROSE.] Hot weather, too. Most exhausting.

ELKIN.

[*To* HELEN.] And you were out and about this morning with Mrs. Elkin before eight, I heard?

HELEN.

She brought me round here.

ELKIN.

[*Sympathetically.*] Ah, yes.

JAMES.

Round here? [ELKIN *motions significantly towards the ceiling.*] Oh—aye. [*After another pause, to* HELEN.] When did you see him last—alive?

HELEN.

In April. He spent Easter with me. [*Unobtrusively opening a little bag which she carries and taking out a handkerchief.*] We always spent our holidays together. [*Drying her eyes.*] I was to have met him at Rouen on the fifteenth of next month; we were going to Etretat.

ELKIN.

[*After a further silence.*] Er—h'm!—the principal business we are here to discuss is, I presume, the question of Miss Thornhill's future.

HELEN.

[*Quickly.*] Oh, no, please.

ELKIN.

No?

HELEN.

If you don't mind, I would rather my future were taken for granted, Mr. Elkin, without any discussion.

ELKIN.

Taken for granted?

HELEN.

I am no worse off than thousands of other young women who are suddenly thrown upon their own resources. I'm a great deal better off than many, for there's a calling already open to me—art. My prospects don't daunt me in the least.

ELKIN.

No, no; nobody wants to discourage you——

HELEN.

[*Interrupting* ELKIN.] I confess—I confess I am disappointed—hurt—that father hasn't made even a slight provision for me—not for the money's sake, but because—because I meant so much to him, I've always believed. He *would* have made me secure if he had lived longer, I am convinced.

ELKIN.

[*Soothingly.*] Not improbable; not improbable.

HELEN.

But I don't intend to let my mind dwell on that. What I do intend to think is that, in leaving me with merely my education and the capacity for earning my living, he has done more for my happiness—my real happiness—than if he had left me every penny he possessed. With no incentive to work, I might have drifted by and by into an idle, aimless life. I *should* have done so.

STEPHEN.

A very rational view to take of it.

PONTING.

Admirable!

[*There is a nodding of heads and a murmur of approval from the ladies.*

ELKIN.

Very admirable and praiseworthy. [*To the others, diplomatically.*] But we are not to conclude that Miss Thornhill declines to entertain the idea of some—some arrangement which would enable her to embark upon her artistic career——

HELEN.

Yes, you are. I don't need assistance, and I couldn't accept it. [*Flaring up.*] I will accept nothing that hasn't come to me direct from my father—nothing. [*Softening.*] But I am none the less grateful to you, dear Mr. Elkin—[*looking round*] to everybody—for this kindness.

STEPHEN.

[*With a sigh.*] So be it; so be it, if it must be so.

PONTING.

We don't wish to *force* assistance upon Miss Thornhill.

STEPHEN.

On the contrary; we respect her independence of character.

[ELKIN *shrugs his shoulders at* VALLANCE, *who is now seated upon the settee on the right.*

JAMES.

[*Stroking his beard.*] Art—art. You've been studying painting, haven't you?

HELEN.

At Julian's, in the Rue de Berri, for three years—for pleasure, I imagined.

JAMES.

[*Glancing furtively at* ANN.] D'ye do oil portraits—family groups and so on?

HELEN.

I'm not very successful as a colorist. Black and white is what I am best at.

JAMES.

[*Dubiously.*] Black and white——

STEPHEN.

Is there much demand for that form of art in Paris?

HELEN.

Paris? Oh, I shall come to London.

JAMES.

London, eh?

HELEN.

My drawing isn't quite good enough for over there. It's only good enough for England. I shall sell my jewellery and furniture—I'm sharing a flat in the Avenue de Messine with an American girl—and that will carry me along excellently till I'm fairly started. Oh, I shall do very well.

ROSE.

I live in London. My house will be somewhere for you to drop into, whenever you feel inclined.

HELEN.

Thank you.

PONTING.

[*Pulling at his moustache.*] Often as you like—often as you like——

ROSE.

[*Loftily.*] As I am in "society," as they call it, that will be nice for you.

JAMES.

[*To* ANN.] Now, then, mother, don't you be behindhand——

ANN.

I'm sure I shall be very pleased if Miss Thornton——

A MURMUR.

Thornhill——

ANN.

If she'll pay us a visit. We're homely people, but she and Cissy could play tennis all day long.

LOUISA.

If she does come to Singlehampton, she mustn't go away without staying a day or two in the Crescent. [*To* HELEN.] Do you play chess, dear? [HELEN *shakes her head.*] My husband will teach you—won't you, Stephen?

STEPHEN.

Honored.

THADDEUS.

[*Who has risen and come forward.*] I'm sorry my wife isn't here. We should be grieved if Miss Thornhill left us out in the cold.

HELEN.

[*Looking at him with interest.*] You are father's musical brother, aren't you?

THADDEUS.

Yes—Tad.

HELEN.

[*With a faint smile.*] I promise not to leave you out in the cold. [*To everybody.*] I can only repeat, I am most grateful. [*To* ELKIN, *about to rise.*] Mrs. Elkin is waiting for me, to take me to the dressmaker——

ELKIN.

[*Detaining her.*] One moment—one moment. [*To the others.*] Gentlemen, Mr. Vallance and I have had our little talk and we agree that the proper course to pursue in the matter of the late Mr. Mortimore's estate is to proceed at once to insert an advertisement in the public journals.

JAMES.

An advertisement?

ELKIN.

With the object of obtaining information respecting any will which he may have made at any time.

JAMES.

[*After a pause.*] Oh—very good.

STEPHEN.

[*Coldly.*] Does Mr. Vallance really advise that this is the proper course?

[VALLANCE *rises and* THADDEUS *again retires.*

VALLANCE.

[*Assentingly.*] In the peculiar circumstances of the case.

ELKIN.

We propose also to go a step further. We propose to circularize.

JAMES.

Circularize?

PONTING.

[*Disturbed.*] What the dev—what's that?

ELKIN.

We propose to address a circular to every solicitor in the law-list asking for such information.

HELEN.

[*To* ELKIN.] Is this necessary?

ELKIN.

Mr. Vallance will tell us——

VALLANCE.

It comes under the head of taking all reasonable measures to find a will.

HELEN.

[*Looking round.*] I—I sincerely hope that no one will think that it is on my behalf that Mr. Elkin——

ELKIN.

[*Checking her.*] My dear, these are formal, and amicable, proceedings, to which *everybody,* we suggest, should be a party.

VALLANCE.

Everybody.

ELKIN.

[*Invitingly.*] Everybody.

JAMES.

[*Breaking a chilly silence.*] All right. Go ahead, Mr. Elkin. [*To* STEPHEN.] We're willing?

STEPHEN.

Why not; why not? Rose——?

ROSE.

[*Hastily.*] Oh, certainly.

VALLANCE.

[*To* JAMES.] I have your authority, Mr. Mortimore, for acting with Mr. Elkin in this matter?

JAMES.

You have, sir.

ELKIN.

[*To* VALLANCE, *rising.*] Will you come round to my office with me?

[HELEN *rises with* ELKIN, *whereupon the other men get to their feet.* ANN *and* LOUISA *also rise as* HELEN *comes to them and offers her hand.*

ANN.

[*Shaking hands.*] We're at the Grand Hotel——

LOUISA.

[*Shaking hands.*] So am I and my husband.

HELEN.

I'll call, if I may.

[*She shakes hands with* STEPHEN *and* JAMES *and goes to* ROSE.

ROSE.

[*Rising to shake hands with her.*] We're at the Grand too. Colonel Ponting and I would be delighted——

PONTING.

Delighted.

[HELEN *merely bows to* PONTING; *then she shakes hands with* THADDEUS *and passes out into the hall.*

ELKIN.

[*Who has opened the door for* HELEN—*to everybody, genially.*] Good-day; good-day.

JAMES *and* STEPHEN.

Good-day, Mr. Elkin. Good-day.

[ELKIN *follows* HELEN.

VALLANCE.

[*At the door—to* JAMES *and* STEPHEN.] Where can I see you later?

JAMES.

The Grand. Food at half-past one.

VALLANCE.

Thank you very much.

[*He bows to the ladies and withdraws, closing the door after him.*

PONTING.

[*Pacing the room indignantly.*] I wouldn't give the fellow so much as a dry biscuit!

[*There is a general break up,* ANN *and* LOUISA *joining* ROSE *on the right.*

JAMES.

[*Pacifically.*] Oh, there's no occasion to upset yourself, Colonel.

PONTING.

[*On the left.*] I wouldn't! I wouldn't! He's against us on every point.

JAMES.

Let 'em advertise, if it amuses 'em. [*In an outburst.*] Let 'em advertise *and* circularize till they're blue in the face.

ROSE.

[*With a shrill laugh.*] Jim! Ha! ha! ha!

ANN *and* LOUISA.

[*Solemnly.*] Hus—s—sh!

JAMES.

[*Dropping to a whisper.*] Oh, I—I forgot.

STEPHEN.

Yes, yes, yes; it's nothing more than a lawyer's trick, to swell their bill of costs.

JAMES.

Of course it isn't; of course it isn't. [*Passing his hand under his beard.*] I want some air, mother. Get out o' this.

ANN.

[*Fastening her mantle.*] You've an appointment at the tailor's, remember.

STEPHEN.

[*Looking at his watch.*] So have I.

JAMES.

Are you coming, Colonel? [*Finding himself in the centre of a group—with a change of manner.*] I say: What a beautiful girl, this girl of Ned's!

STEPHEN.

Exceedingly.

PONTING.

[*Producing his cigarette-case.*] Charming young woman.

ANN *and* LOUISA.

Lovely. A lovely girl.

ROSE.

Quite presentable.

JAMES.

And she doesn't ask a shilling of us—not a bob.

STEPHEN.

She impressed me enormously.

PONTING.

[*An unlighted cigarette in his mouth.*] Charming; charming.

JAMES.

Ned ought to have left her a bit; he ought to have left her a bit. [*Resolutely.*] Mother—we'll have her down home.

STEPHEN.

We must tell some fib or other as to who she is. Yes, we'll show her a little hospitality.

PONTING.

And Rose—in London. That'll make it up to her.

ROSE.

Yes, that'll make it up to her.

[*The ladies move into the hall; the men follow.*

JAMES.

[*In the doorway—to* THADDEUS, *who is now seated at the writing-table.*] Tad, I'll stand you and your wife a good lunch. One-thirty.

[THADDEUS *nods acceptance and* JAMES *goes after the others.* THADDEUS *rises, and, looking through the blind of the middle window, watches them depart. Presently* PHYLLIS *appears, putting on her gloves.*

PHYLLIS.

[*At the door, drawing a breath of relief.*] They've gone.

THADDEUS.

[*Turning.*] Is that you, Phyl?

PHYLLIS.

[*Coming further into the room.*] I've been waiting on the landing.

THADDEUS.

Why didn't you come back, dear? You've missed Miss Thornhill.

PHYLLIS.

[*Walking away to the left, working at the fingers of a glove.*] Yes, I—I know.

THADDEUS.

The very person we were all here to meet.

PHYLLIS.

I—I came over nervous. [*Eagerly.*] What is she like?

THADDEUS.

Such an aristocratic-looking girl.

PHYLLIS.

Is she—is she?

THADDEUS.

I'll tell you all about her by and by. [*Pushing the door to and coming to* PHYLLIS, *anxiously.*] What do you think they're going to do now, Phyl?

PHYLLIS.

Who?

THADDEUS.

The lawyers. They're going to advertise.

PHYLLIS.

Advertise?

THADDEUS.

In the papers—to try to discover a will.

PHYLLIS.

I—I suppose that's a mere matter of form?

THADDEUS.

Elkin and Vallance say so. According to Stephen, it's simply a lawyer's dodge to run up costs. [*Brightening.*] Anyhow, we mustn't complain, where a big estate is involved——

PHYLLIS.

Is it—such a—big estate?

THADDEUS.

Guess.

PHYLLIS.

I can't.

THADDEUS.

[*Coming closer to her.*] I heard Elkin's managing-clerk tell Jim and the Colonel this morning that poor Ned may have died worth anything between a hundred and fifty and two hundred thousand pounds.

PHYLLIS.

[*Faintly.*] Two hundred thousand——!

THADDEUS.

Yes.

PHYLLIS.

Oh, Tad——!

[*She sits, on the settee on the left, leaning her head upon her hands.*

THADDEUS.

Splitting the difference, and allowing for death duties, our share would be close upon forty thousand. To be on the safe side, put it at thirty-nine thousand. Thirty-nine thousand pounds! [*Moving about the room excitedly.*] I've been reckoning. Invest that at four per cent.—one is justified in calculating upon a four per cent. basis—invest thirty-nine thousand at four per cent., and there you have an income of over fifteen hundred a year. Fifteen hundred a year! [*Returning to her.*] When we die, seven hundred and fifty a year for Joyce, seven hundred and fifty for Cyril! [*She rises quickly and clings to him, burying her head upon his*

shoulder and clutching at the lapel of his coat.] Poor old lady! [*Putting his arms round her.*] Poor old lady! You've gone through such a lot, haven't you?

PHYLLIS.

[*Sobbing.*] We both have.

THADDEUS.

Sixteen years of it.

PHYLLIS.

Sixteen years.

THADDEUS.

Of struggle—struggle and failure.

PHYLLIS.

Failure brought upon you by your wife—by me.

THADDEUS.

Nonsense—nonsense——

PHYLLIS.

You always call it nonsense; you know it's true. If you hadn't married me—if you'd married a girl of better family—you wouldn't have lost caste in the town——

THADDEUS.

Hush, hush! Don't cry, Phyl; don't cry, old lady.

PHYLLIS.

You'd have had the choral societies, and the High School, and the organ at All Saints; you'd have been at the top of the tree long ago. You know you would!

THADDEUS.

[*Rallying her.*] And if *you* hadn't married *me,* you might have captivated a gay young officer at Claybrook and got to London eventually. Rose did it, and you might have done it. So that makes us quits. Don't cry.

PHYLLIS.

[*Gradually regaining her composure.*] There *was* a young fellow at the barracks who was after me.

THADDEUS.

[*Nodding.*] You were prettier than Rose, a smarter girl altogether.

PHYLLIS.

[*Drying her eyes.*] I'll be smart again now, dear. I'm only thirty-five. What's thirty-five!

THADDEUS.

The children won't swallow up everything now, will they?

PHYLLIS.

No; but Joyce shall look sweeter and daintier than ever, though.

THADDEUS.

Cyril shall have a first-class, public-school education; that I'm determined upon. There's Rugby—Rugby's the nearest —or Malvern——

PHYLLIS.

[*With a catch in her breath.*] Oh, but—Tad—we'll leave Singlehampton, won't we?

THADDEUS.

Permanently?

PHYLLIS.

Yes—yes——

THADDEUS.

Won't that be rather a mistake?

PHYLLIS.

A mistake!

THADDEUS.

Just as we're able to hold up our heads in the town.

PHYLLIS.

We should never be able to hold up our heads in Singlehampton. If we were clothed in gold, we should still be lepers underneath; the curse would still rest on us.

THADDEUS.

[*Bewildered.*] But where—where shall we——?

PHYLLIS.

I don't care—anywhere. [*Passionately.*] Anywhere where I'm not sneered at for bringing up my children decently, and for making my home more tasteful than my neighbors'; anywhere where it isn't known that I'm the daughter of a small shopkeeper—the daughter of "old Burdock of West Street"! [*Imploringly.*] Oh, Tad——!

THADDEUS.

You're right. Nothing is ever forgiven you in the place you're born in. We'll clear out.

PHYLLIS.

[*Slipping her arm through his.*] When—when will you get me away?

THADDEUS.

Directly, directly; as soon as the lawyers——

[*He pauses, looking at her blankly.*

PHYLLIS.

[*Frightened.*] What's the matter?

THADDEUS.

We—we're talking as if—as if Ned's money is already ours!

PHYLLIS.

[*Withdrawing her arm—steadily.*] It will be.

THADDEUS.

Will it, do you think——?

PHYLLIS.

[*With an expressionless face.*] I prophesy—it will be.

[HEATH *enters and, seeing* THADDEUS *and* PHYLLIS, *draws back.*

HEATH.

I'm sorry, sir. I thought the room was empty.

THADDEUS.

We're going. [*As he and* PHYLLIS *pass out into the hall.*] Don't come to the door.

HEATH.

Thank you, sir.

[HEATH *quietly and methodically replaces the chair at the window on the right. Then, after a last look round, he switches off the lights and leaves the room again in gloom.*

END OF THE FIRST ACT

THE SECOND ACT

The scene represents the drawing-room of a modern, cheaply-built villa. In the wall at the back are two windows. One is a bay-window provided with a window-seat; the other, the window on the right, opens to the ground into a small garden. At the bottom of the garden a paling runs from left to right, and in the paling there is a gate which gives access to a narrow lane. Beyond are the gardens and backs of other houses.

The fireplace is on the right of the room, the door on the left. A grand pianoforte, with its head towards the windows, and a music-stool occupy the middle of the room. On the right of the music-stool there is an armchair, and against the piano, facing the fireplace, there is a settee. Another settee faces the audience at the further end of the fireplace, and on the nearer side, opposite this settee, is an armchair. Also on the right hand, but nearer to the spectator, there is a round table. An ottoman, opposing the settee by the piano, stands close to the table.

At the end of the piano there is a small table with an armchair on its right and left, and on the extreme left of the room stands another armchair with a still smaller table beside it. On the left of the bay-window there is a writing-table, and in front of the writing-table, but turned to the window, a chair. Other articles of furniture fill spaces against the walls.

There is a mirror over the fireplace and a clock on the mantel-shelf, and lying upon the round table are a hat and a pair of gloves belonging to HELEN. *Some flowers in pots hide the empty grate.*

The room and everything in the room are eloquent of narrow means, if not of actual poverty. But the way in which the cheap furniture is dressed up, and the manner of its arrangement about the room, give evidence of taste and refinement.

The garden is full of the bright sunshine of a fine July afternoon.

THADDEUS *is at the piano accompanying a sentimental ballad which* TRIST, *standing beside him, is singing.* PHYLLIS, *looking more haggard than when last seen, is on the settee by the fireplace. Her hands lie idly upon some needlework in her lap and she is in deep thought.* HELEN, *engaged in making a sketch of* JOYCE *and* CYRIL, *who are facing her, is sitting in the chair on the right of the table at the end of the piano. A drawing-block is on her knees and a box of crayons on the table at her elbow.* HELEN *and the* THADDEUS MORTIMORES *are dressed in mourning, but not oppressively so.*

THADDEUS.

[*Taking his hands from the key-board—to* TRIST.] No, no. Fill your lungs, man, fill your lungs.

[PHYLLIS, *roused by the break in the music, picks up her work.*

TRIST.

[*A big, healthy-looking, curly-headed young fellow in somewhat shabby clerical clothes.*] I'm afraid it's no good, my dear chap. The fact is, air will not keep in my lungs.

THADDEUS.

[*Starting afresh with the symphony.*] Once more——

HELEN.

[*To the children, softly.*] Do you want a rest?

CYRIL.

[*A handsome boy of fourteen, standing close to his sister.*] No, thanks.

JOYCE.

[*In the chair on the extreme left—a slim, serious child, a year older than* CYRIL.] Oh, no; don't give us a rest.

[*As the symphony ends, the door opens a little way and* JAMES *pops his head in.*

JAMES.

Hallo!

THADDEUS.

Hallo, Jim!

[JAMES *enters, followed by* STEPHEN; *both with an air of bustle and self-importance. They also are in mourning, are gloved, and are wearing their hats which they remove on entering.*

STEPHEN.

May we come in?

JAMES.

Good-afternoon, Mr. Trist.

STEPHEN.

How do you do, Mr. Trist?

TRIST.

[*To* JAMES *and* STEPHEN.] How are you; how are you?

JAMES.

[*To the children, kissing* JOYCE.] Well, kids! [*Shaking hands with* HELEN.] Well, my dear! [*Crossing to* PHYLLIS, *who rises.*] Don't get up, Phyllis. What's this? You're not very bobbish, I hear.

PHYLLIS.

[*Nervously.*] It's nothing.

THADDEUS.

[*Tidying his music.*] She's sleeping badly just now, poor old lady.

STEPHEN.

[*Who has greeted* HELEN *and the children—to* PHYLLIS.] Oh, Phyllis, Louisa has discovered a wonderful cure for sleeplessness at the herbalist's in Crown Street. A few dried leaves merely. You strew them under the bed and the effect is magical.

JAMES.

Glass of warm milk's *my* remedy——

STEPHEN.

Eighteen-pence an ounce, it costs.

JAMES.

Not that sleeplessness bothers *me*.

PHYLLIS.

[*Sitting on the ottoman and resuming her work—to* STEPHEN.] Thank you for telling me about it.

JAMES.

[*To* HELEN.] Making quite a long stay here.

HELEN.

[*Smiling.*] Am I not?

STEPHEN.

You and Phyllis, Tad, are more honored than we were in the Crescent.

JAMES.

Or we were at "Ivanhoe." She was only a couple o' nights with us.

STEPHEN.

Less with us. She arrived one morning and left the next.

JAMES.

[*To* HELEN.] Been in Nelson Villas over a week, haven't you?

HELEN.

[*Touching her drawing.*] Is it more than a week?

JAMES.

[*Looking at* HELEN'S *drawing.*] Taking the youngsters' portraits, too.

STEPHEN.

[*Also looking at the drawing.*] H'm! I suppose children *are* difficult subjects.

TRIST.

[*Moving towards the door—to* HELEN.] Miss Thornhill, don't forget your engagement.

HELEN.

[*To* JOYCE *and* CYRIL.] Mr. Trist is going to treat us to the flower-show by and by.

CYRIL.

Good man!

JOYCE.

Oh, Mr. Trist!

STEPHEN.

[*To* TRIST.] Not driving you away, I hope?

TRIST.

[*At the door.*] No, no; I've some work to do.

[*He withdraws.* STEPHEN *puts his hat on the top of the piano.*

JAMES.

[*After watching the door close.*] Decent sort o' young man, that; nothing of the lodger about him.

STEPHEN.

I've always said so. [*To* THADDEUS, *lowering his voice.*] Mr. Trist knows how—er—h'm—poor Edward left his affairs?

THADDEUS.

Everybody does; it's all over the town.

STEPHEN.

[*Resignedly.*] Yes; impossible to keep it to ourselves.

JAMES.

Thanks to their precious advertisement. [*To* JOYCE *and* CYRIL, *loudly.*] Now, then, children; be off with you! I want to talk to your father and mother.

JOYCE.

[*To* HELEN.] Will you excuse us?

CYRIL.

Awfully sorry, Helen.

[*The children pass through the open window into the garden and disappear.* HELEN *rises and, having laid her drawing-block aside, is following them.*

JAMES.

[*To* HELEN.] Not you, my dear. You're welcome to hear our business.

HELEN.

Oh, no; you mustn't let me intrude.

STEPHEN.

I think Helen *ought* to hear it. [HELEN *pauses, standing by the table on the right.*] I think she ought to be made aware of what's going on.

JAMES.

Tad——

THADDEUS.

[*Coming forward.*] Eh?

JAMES.

The meeting's to take place this afternoon.

[PHYLLIS *looks up from her work suddenly, with parted lips.*

THADDEUS.

This afternoon?

STEPHEN.

At four o'clock.

THADDEUS.

[*Glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece.*] It's past three now.

JAMES.

[*Placing his hat on the table at the end of the piano and sitting at the left of the table.*] It's been fixed up at last rather in a hurry.

STEPHEN.

[*Sitting in the chair on the extreme left.*] We didn't get Elkin's letter, telling us he was coming through, till this morning.

THADDEUS.

You might have notified us earlier, though, one of you. Just like you fellows!

STEPHEN.

[*Waving his arms.*] On the day I go to press I've quite enough to remember.

JAMES.

[*To* THADDEUS, *roughly.*] It's your holiday-time; what have *you* got to do? An hour's notice is as good as a week's.

STEPHEN.

[*To* HELEN.] This is a meeting of the family, Helen, to be held at my brother's house, for the purpose of—er——

HELEN.

[*Advancing a little.*] Winding matters up?

JAMES.

For the purpose of receiving Elkin and Vallance's report.

HELEN.

[*Keenly.*] And to——?

JAMES.

And to decide upon the administration of the estate on behalf of the next-of-kin.

HELEN.

In my words—wind matters up. [*With an appearance of cheerfulness.*] Which means an end to a month's suspense, doesn't it?

THADDEUS.

[*Apologetically.*] A not very satisfactory end to yours.

HELEN.

To mine? [*With an effort.*] Oh, I—I've suffered no suspense, Mr. Tad. Mr. Elkin has kept me informed of the result of the advertising and the circularizing from the beginning.

THADDEUS.

But there has been no result.

HELEN.

No result *is* the result.

STEPHEN.

Exactly.

[*During the following talk,* HELEN *moves away and seats herself in the chair by the head of the piano.* PHYLLIS *has resumed her work again, bending over it so that her face is almost hidden.*

THADDEUS.

[*To* JAMES *and* STEPHEN.] Will Rose and the Colonel be down?

JAMES.

We're on our way to the station to meet 'em.

STEPHEN.

[*Bitterly.*] Ha! Will they be down?

THADDEUS.

You didn't overlook *them,* evidently.

JAMES.

[*With a growl.*] No; the gallant Colonel doesn't give us much chance of overlooking *him.*

STEPHEN.

Colonel Ponting might be the only person interested, judging by the tone he adopts.

JAMES.

A nice life he's been leading us lately.

STEPHEN.

Elkin and Vallance are sick of him

JAMES.

Hasn't two penny pieces to clink together; that's the size of it.

STEPHEN.

A man may be hard up and yet behave with dignity.

JAMES.

I expect the decorators are asking for a bit on the nail.

THADDEUS.

[*Sitting on the right of the table at the end of the piano.*] Decorators?

STEPHEN.

[*To* THADDEUS.] Haven't you heard——?

THADDEUS.

No.

STEPHEN.

The magnificent house they've taken in Carlos Place——?

JAMES.

Close to Berkeley Square.

STEPHEN.

[*Correcting* JAMES's *pronunciation.*] *Bark*eley Square.

JAMES.

Stables and motor-garridge at the back.

STEPHEN.

Oh, yes; they're decorating and furnishing most elaborately. Lou had a note from Rose a day or two since.

JAMES.

He'll strip my sister of every penny she's come into, if she doesn't look out.

STEPHEN.

The gross indelicacy of the thing is what offends me. *We* have been content to remain passive.

JAMES.

And I fancy our plans and projects are as important as the Colonel's.

STEPHEN.

I should assume so.

JAMES.

[*To* STEPHEN, *with a jerk of the thumb towards* THADDEUS.] Shall I——?

STEPHEN.

No harm in it *now.*

JAMES.

[*To* THADDEUS, *leaning foward—impressively.*] Tad——

THADDEUS.

What?

JAMES.

That land at the bottom of Gordon Street, where the allotment grounds are——

THADDEUS.

Yes?

JAMES.

It's mine.

THADDEUS.

Yours, Jim?

JAMES.

It belongs to me. I've signed the contract and paid a deposit.

THADDEUS.

What do you intend to do with it?

JAMES.

What should I intend to do with it—eat it? I intend to build there—build the finest avenue of houses in Singlehampton. [*Rising and going to the piano, where he traces a plan on the lid with his finger.*] Look here! [THADDEUS *joins him and watches the tracing of the plan.*] Here's Gordon Street. Here's the pub at the corner. I come along here—straight along here—to Albert Terrace. Opposite Albert Terrace I take in Clark's piano factory; and where Clark's factory stands I lay out an ornamental garden with a fountain in the middle of it. On I go at a curve, to avoid the playground of Fothergill's school, till I reach Bolton's store. He stops me, but I'll squeeze him out some day, as sure as my name's James Henry! [*To* THADDEUS.] D'ye see?

THADDEUS.

[*Uncomfortably, eyeing* HELEN.] Splendid; splendid.

JAMES.

[*Moving round the head of the piano to the right.*] Poor old Ned! Ha! my brother won't have done so badly by his native town after all.

THADDEUS.

[*Under his breath, trying to remind* JAMES *of* HELEN'S *presence.*] Jim—Jim——

JAMES.

[*Obliviously, coming upon* HELEN.] D'ye know the spot we're talking about, my dear?

HELEN.

No.

JAMES.

You must get 'em to walk you down there. [*To* PHYLLIS.] You trot her down there, Phyllis.

PHYLLIS.

[*Without raising her eyes from her work.*] I will.

STEPHEN.

[*To* JAMES.] You haven't told them *everything,* Jim.

JAMES.

[*Sitting upon the settee by the piano.*] Haven't I? [*Mopping his brow.*] Oh, your offices——

STEPHEN.

[*To everybody.*] It isn't of the greatest importance, perhaps, but it's part of James's scheme to erect an exceptionably noble building in the new road to provide adequate printing and publishing offices for the *Times and Mirror.*

THADDEUS.

What, you're not deserting King Street, Stephen?

STEPHEN.

[*Rising and walking to the fireplace.*] Yes, I've had enough of those cramped, poky premises.

THADDEUS.

They *are* inconvenient.

STEPHEN.

[*On the hearthrug, facing the others.*] And, to be perfectly frank, I've had enough of Mr. Hammond and the *Courier.*

THADDEUS.

I don't blame you there. The *Courier* is atrociously personal occasionally.

STEPHEN.

[*Pompously.*] I don't say it because Hammond is, in a manner, my rival—I'm not so small-minded as that—but I do say that he is a vulgar man and that the *Courier* is a vulgar and mischievous journal.

JAMES.

He's up to date, though, is Mister Freddy Hammond.

STEPHEN.

His plant is slightly more modern than mine, I admit.

JAMES.

[*Chuckling.*] Aye, you'll be able to present those antediluvian printing-presses of yours to the museum as curiosities.

STEPHEN.

[*With a wave of the hand.*] Anyhow, the construction of Jim's new road marks a new era in the life of the *Times and Mirror.* [*Leaving the fireplace.*] I'm putting no less than twelve thousand pounds into the dear old paper, Tad.

THADDEUS.

[*Standing by the table on the left.*] Twelve thousand——!

STEPHEN.

How will that agree with Mr. Hammond's digestion, eh? Twelve thousand pounds! [*Coming to* THADDEUS.] And what are *your* plans for the future, if one may ask? You'll leave these wretched villas, of course?

THADDEUS.

[*Evasively.*] Oh, I—I'm waiting till this law business is absolutely settled.

STEPHEN.

[*Hastily.*] Quite right; quite right. So am I; so am I, actually. But we may talk, I suppose, among ourselves——

JAMES.

[*Looking at his watch and rising.*] By George! We shall miss Rose and the Colonel.

STEPHEN.

[*Fetching his hat.*] Pish! the Colonel.

JAMES.

[*Shaking hands hurriedly with* HELEN *who rises.*] Ta-ta, my dear. [*As he passes* PHYLLIS.] See you at the meeting, Phyllis.

STEPHEN.

[*To* HELEN, *across the piano.*] Good-bye, Helen.

JAMES.

[*Who has picked up his hat, at the door.*] Don't be late, Tad.

STEPHEN.

[*At the door.*] No, no; don't be late.

THADDEUS.

Four o'clock.

STEPHEN.

Sharp.

[THADDEUS *follows* JAMES *and* STEPHEN *into the hall and returns immediately.*

THADDEUS.

[*Closing the door.*] My dear Helen, I apologize to you most humbly.

HELEN.

[*Coming forward.*] For what?

THADDEUS.

For Jim's bad taste, and Stephen's, in talking before you as they've been doing.

HELEN.

Oh, it's of no consequence.

THADDEUS.

I could have kicked Jim.

HELEN.

[*Impulsively.*] Mr. Tad—[*giving him her hand*] I congratulate you. [*Going to* PHYLLIS *and kissing her lightly upon the cheek.*] I congratulate you both heartily. No two people in the world deserve good fortune more than you do.

THADDEUS.

It's extremely kind and gracious of you to take it in this way.

HELEN.

Why, in what other way could I take it?

THADDEUS.

At your age, you mayn't esteem money very highly. But —there are other considerations——

HELEN.

[*Turning away and seating herself upon the settee by the piano.*] Yes, we won't speak of those.

THADDEUS.

[*Walking to the bay-window.*] And there was just a chance that the inquiries might have brought a will to light —a will benefiting you. Though you were anxious not to appear unfriendly to the family, you must have realized that.

HELEN.

Whether I did or not, it's all done with now finally—finally. [*Blowing the subject from her.*] Phew!

THADDEUS.

[*His elbows on the piano, speaking across it to* HELEN.] Phyl and I are not altogether selfish and grasping. She has been worrying herself to death these last few days—haven't you, Phyl?—ever since we heard the meeting was near at hand.

PHYLLIS.

[*In a low voice.*] Yes.

THADDEUS.

Ever since you came to us, in fact.

HELEN.

[*Jumping up.*] Ah, what a nuisance I've been to you! [*Sitting beside* PHYLLIS.] How relieved you'll be to pack me off to-morrow!

THADDEUS.

To-morrow?

[*Uttering a little sound,* PHYLLIS *stops working and stares straight before her.*

HELEN.

[*Slipping an arm round* PHYLLIS'S *waist.*] That letter I had while we were at lunch—it was from a girl who used

to sit next to me at Julian's. She's found me some capital rooms, she says, close to Regent's Park, and I'm going up to look at them. [THADDEUS *comes to her.*] In any event, the sooner I get out of Singlehampton the better.

THADDEUS.

Why?

HELEN.

Everybody in the town eyes me so queerly; I'm certain they suspect.

THADDEUS.

It's your imagination.

HELEN.

It isn't. [*Hesitatingly.*] I—I've confided in Mr. Trist.

THADDEUS.

[*Surprised.*] Confided in Trist?

HELEN.

[*Nodding.*] I hated the idea of his thinking me—deceitful.

THADDEUS.

[*Sitting on the settee by the piano.*] Trist would never have guessed.

HELEN.

Oh, Mr. Tad, who, in heaven's name, that wasn't born yesterday *could* believe the story of my being simply a *protégée* of father's, the daughter of an old business friend of his? Your brother Stephen may be an excellent editor, but his powers of invention are beneath contempt.

THADDEUS.

[*Laughing.*] Ha, ha, ha! [*Rubbing his knees.*] That's one for Stephen; that's a rap for Stephen.

HELEN.

And then, again, the other members of the family are becoming so horribly jealous.

THADDEUS.

[*Seriously.*] Ah, yes.

HELEN.

You noticed your brother's remarks? And Mrs. James and Mrs. Stephen almost cut me in East Street this morning.

THADDEUS.

[*Clenching his fists.*] Thank God, we shall have done with that sort of thing directly we shake the dust of Singlehampton from our feet!

HELEN.

Directly you——!

THADDEUS.

[*Gaily.*] There! Now I've let the cat out of the bag. Phyllis will tell you. You tell her, Phyl. [*Rising.*] I promised Rawlinson I'd help him index his madrigals this afternoon; I'll run round to him and explain. [*Pausing on his way to the door.*] Helen, you must be our first visitor in our new home, wherever we pitch our tent. Make that a bargain with her, Phyl. [*At the door, to* PHYLLIS.] We'll start at ten minutes to, old lady. Be ready.

[*He disappears, closing the door after him.*

HELEN.

[*Rising and walking away to the left.*] Well! I do think it shabby of you, Phyllis. You and Mr. Tad might have trusted me with your secret. [*Facing her.*] Phyllis, wouldn't it be glorious if you came to London to live—or near London? Wouldn't it?

PHYLLIS.

[*In a strange, quiet voice, her hands lying quite still upon her lap.*] Helen—Helen dear——

HELEN.

Yes?

PHYLLIS.

That morning, a month ago, in Linchpool—while we were all sitting in your poor father's library waiting for you——

HELEN.

[*Returning to her.*] On the Friday morning——

PHYLLIS.

There was a discussion as to making you an allowance, and—[*her eyes avoiding* HELEN'S] and everybody was most anxious—most anxious—that you should be placed upon a proper footing.

HELEN.

Mr. Elkin broached the subject when I arrived. You were out of the room.

PHYLLIS.

Yes. And you declined——

HELEN.

Certainly. I gave them my reasons. Why do you bring this up?

[PHYLLIS *rises, laying her work upon the table behind her.*

PHYLLIS.

[*Drawing a deep breath.*] Helen—I want you to reconsider your decision.

HELEN.

Reconsider it?

PHYLLIS.

I want you to reconsider your determination not to accept an allowance from the family.

HELEN.

Impossible.

PHYLLIS.

Oh, don't be so hasty. Listen first. This good fortune of ours—of Tad's and mine—that you've congratulated us upon—I shall never enjoy it——

HELEN.

[*Incredulously.*] Oh, Phyllis!

PHYLLIS.

I shall not. It will never bring me a moment's happiness unless you consent to receive an allowance from the family —[HELEN *seats herself in the chair on the extreme left with her back to* PHYLLIS] sufficient to give you a sense of independence——

HELEN.

I couldn't.

PHYLLIS.

And to make your future perfectly safe.

HELEN.

I couldn't.

PHYLLIS.

[*Entreatingly.*] Do—do——

HELEN.

It's out of the question.

PHYLLIS.

Please—for my sake——!

HELEN.

[*Turning to her.*] I'm sorry to distress you, Phyllis; indeed I'm sorry. But when you see me gaining some little position in London, through my work, you'll cease to feel miserable about me.

PHYLLIS.

Never—never——

HELEN.

[*Starting up and walking to the fireplace impetuously.*] Oh, you don't understand me—my pride. A pensioner of the Mortimore family! I! How can you suggest it? I refused their help before I was fully acquainted with these, to me, uncongenial relations of father's—I don't include Mr. Tad in that expression, of course; and now I *am* acquainted with them I would refuse it a thousand times. If I were starving, I wouldn't put myself under the smallest obligation to the Mortimores.

PHYLLIS.

[*Unsteadily.*] Obligation—to—the—Mortimores—obligation——! [*As if about to make some communication to* HELEN, *supporting herself by leaning upon the table on the right, her body bent forward—almost inaudibly.*] Helen—Helen——

HELEN.

What——?

[*There is a short silence, and then* PHYLLIS *drops back upon the settee by the piano.*

PHYLLIS.

[*Rocking herself to and fro.*] Oh—oh, dear—oh——!

HELEN.

[*Coming to her and standing over her.*] You're quite ill, Phyllis; your bad nights are taking it out of you dreadfully. You ought to have the advice of a doctor.

PHYLLIS.

[*Weakly.*] No—don't send for the doctor——

HELEN.

Go up to your room, then, and keep quiet till Mr. Tad calls you. [*Glancing at the clock.*] You've a quarter of an hour——

PHYLLIS.

[*Clutching* HELEN'S *skirt.*] Helen—you're fond of me and Tad—you said yesterday how attached you'd grown to us——

HELEN.

[*Soothingly.*] I am—I am—very fond of you.

PHYLLIS.

And the children——?

HELEN.

Yes, yes.

PHYLLIS.

My poor children!

HELEN.

Hush! Why *poor* children? Pull yourself together. Go up to your room.

PHYLLIS.

[*Taking* HELEN'S *hand and caressing it.*] Helen—if you won't accept an allowance from the entire family, accept it from Tad and me.

HELEN.

No, no, no.

PHYLLIS.

Four—three hundred a year.

HELEN.

No.

PHYLLIS.

Two hundred.

HELEN.

No.

PHYLLIS.

We could spare it. We shouldn't miss it; we should never miss it.

HELEN.

Not a penny.

PHYLLIS.

[*Rising and gripping* HELEN's *shoulders.*] You shall—you shall accept it, Helen.

HELEN.

Phyllis! [*Releasing herself and drawing back.*] Phyllis, you're very odd to-day. You've got this allowance idea on the brain. Look here; don't let's mention the subject again, or I—I shall be offended.

PHYLLIS.

[*Dully, hanging her head.*] All right. Very well.

HELEN.

Forgive me. It happens to be just the one point I'm sensitive upon. [*Listening, then going to the open window.*] Here are the children. Do go up-stairs. [*Calling into the garden.*] Hallo! [PHYLLIS *leaves the room as* CYRIL *and* JOYCE *appear outside the window. The boy is carrying a few freshly-cut roses.*] Now, then, children! Isn't it time we routed Mr. Trist out of his study?

CYRIL.

[*Entering and going towards the door.*] I'll stir the old chap up. [*Remembering the nosegay.*] Oh—— [*Presenting it to* HELEN, *who comes forward with* JOYCE.] Allow me——

HELEN.

For me? How sweet of you! [*Placing the flowers against her belt and then at her breast.*] Where shall I wear them—here, or here?

CYRIL.

Anywhere you like. [*Awkwardly.*] We sha'n't see anything nicer at the flower-show, I'm certain.

HELEN.

No; they're beautiful.

CYRIL.

[*His eyes on the carpet.*] I don't mean the flowers—

HELEN.

[*Inclining her head.*] Thank you. [*To* CYRIL, *who again makes for the door.*] Don't disturb mother. [*Moving away to the fireplace where, at the mirror over the mantel-shelf, she fixes the roses in her belt.*] She has to go to Claybrook Road with your father in a little while and I want her to rest.

CYRIL.

[*Pausing.*] She *is* seedy, isn't she? [*Puckering his brows.*] Going to Uncle Jim's, are they?

HELEN.

Yes.

CYRIL.

That's to do with our money, I expect.

HELEN.

[*Busy at the mirror.*] With your money?

CYRIL.

Father's come into a heap of money, you know.

JOYCE.

[*Reproachfully.*] Cyril!

CYRIL.

[*Not heeding her.*] So have Uncle Jim and Uncle Stephen and Aunt Rose.

HELEN.

I'm delighted.

CYRIL.

[*To* JOYCE, *who is signing to him to desist.*] Oh, what's the use of our keeping it dark any longer?

JOYCE.

We promised mother——

CYRIL.

Ages ago. But you heard what father said to Uncle Stephen—it's all over the town. Young Pither says there's something about it in the paper.

HELEN.

The paper?

CYRIL.

The *Courier*—that fellow Hammond's paper. Hammond was beastly sarcastic about it last week, Pither says. [*Going to the door.*] I don't read the *Courier* myself. [*At the door he beckons to* JOYCE. *She joins him and his voice drops to a whisper.*] Besides—[*glancing significantly at* HELEN, *whose back is turned to them*] it'll make it easier for *us*. [*Nudging her.*] Now's your chance; do it now. [*Aloud.*] Give me five minutes, you two. I can't be seen at the flower-show in these togs.

[*He withdraws. Having assured herself that the door is closed,* JOYCE *advances to* HELEN.

JOYCE.

Helen——

HELEN.

Hallo!

JOYCE.

[*Gravely.*] Have you a minute to spare?

HELEN.

[*Coming to the round table.*] Yes, dear.

JOYCE.

Helen, it's quite true we've come into a great deal of money. Uncle Edward, who lived at Linchpool—oh, you knew him, didn't you?—he was a friend of yours——

HELEN.

[*Nodding.*] He was a friend of mine.

JOYCE.

Uncle Edward has left his fortune to the family—[*breaking off*] you've been told already!——

HELEN.

Well—yes.

JOYCE.

We haven't received our share yet; but we *shall,* as soon as it's all divided up. [*Timidly.*] Helen—[HELEN *seats herself upon the ottoman in an attitude of attention*] I needn't tell you this will very much improve father and mother's position.

HELEN.

Naturally.

JOYCE.

And mine and Cyril's, too. I'm to finish abroad, I believe.

HELEN.

Lucky brat.

JOYCE.

But it's Cyril I want to talk to you about—my brother Cyril——

HELEN.

Cyril?

JOYCE.

Cyril is to be entered for one of the principal public schools.

HELEN.

Is he?

JOYCE.

One of those schools which stamp a boy a gentleman for the rest of his life.

HELEN.

He is a gentleman, as it is. I've a high opinion of Cyril.

JOYCE.

Oh, I *am* glad to hear you say so, because—because——

HELEN.

Because what? [JOYCE *turns away in silence to the settee by the piano.*] What are you driving at, Joicey?

JOYCE.

[*Lounging on the settee uneasily and inelegantly.*] Of course, Cyril's only fourteen at present; there's no denying that.

HELEN.

suppose there isn't.

JOYCE.

But in three years' time he'll be seventeen, and in another three he'll be twenty.

HELEN.

[*Puzzled.*] Well?

JOYCE.

And at twenty you're a man, aren't you?

HELEN.

A young man.

JOYCE.

[*Seating herself, her elbows on her knees, examining her fingers.*] And even then he'd be content to wait.

HELEN.

To wait? What for?

JOYCE.

[*In a low voice.*] Cyril wishes to marry you some day, Helen.

HELEN.

[*After a pause, gently.*] Does he?

JOYCE.

He consulted me about it soon after you came to us, and I advised him to be quite sure of himself before he spoke to you. And he *is,* quite sure of himself.

HELEN.

And he's asked you to speak *for* him?

JOYCE.

He prefers my doing it. [*Looking, under her lashes, at* HELEN.] Are you furious?

HELEN.

Not a scrap.

JOYCE.

[*Transferring herself from the settee to the floor at* HELEN'S *feet—embracing her.*] Oh, that's lovely of you! I was afraid you might be.

HELEN.

Furious?

JOYCE.

[*Gazing at her admiringly.*] At our aiming so high. I was afraid you might consider that marrying Cyril would be marrying beneath you.

HELEN.

[*Tenderly.*] The girl who marries Cyril will have to be a far grander person than I am, Joyce, to be marrying beneath her.

JOYCE.

Oh, Cyril's all right in himself, and so is father. Father's very retiring, but he's as clever a musician as any in the midlands. And mother is all right in *herself*. [*Backing away from* HELEN.] It's not mother's fault; it's her misfortune——

HELEN.

Her misfortune——?

JOYCE.

[*Bitterly.*] Oh, I'll be bound they mentioned it at "Ivanhoe" or at the Crescent.

HELEN.

Mentioned——?

JOYCE.

[*Between her teeth.*] The shop—grandfather's shop——

HELEN.

Ah, yes.

JOYCE.

[*Clenching her hands.*] Ah! [*Squatting upon her heels, her shoulders hunched.*] Grandfather was a grocer, Helen —a grocer. Oh, mother has suffered terribly through it—agonies.

HELEN.

Poor mother!

JOYCE.

We've all suffered. Sometimes it's been as much as Cyril and I could do to keep our heads up; [*proudly, with flashing eyes*] but we've done it. The Singlehampton people are beasts.

HELEN.

Joyce!

JOYCE.

If it's the last word I ever utter—beasts. [*Swallowing a tear.*] And only half of it was grocery—only half.

HELEN.

Only half——?

JOYCE.

It was a double shop. There were two windows; the other half was bottles of wine. They forget that; they forget that!

HELEN.

A shame.

JOYCE.

[*Embracing* HELEN *again.*] What shall I say to him, then?

HELEN.

Say to him?

JOYCE.

Cyril—what answer shall I give him?

HELEN.

Oh, tell Cyril that I am highly complimented by his offer——

JOYCE.

[*Eagerly.*] Complimented—yes——?

HELEN.

And that, if he's of the same mind when he's a man, and I am still single, he may propose to me again.

JOYCE.

[*In alarm.*] If you're—still single——?

HELEN.

Yes—[*shaking her head*] and if he's of the same mind.

[*There is a sharp, prolonged rapping on the door.* JOYCE *and* HELEN *rise.*

JOYCE.

[*Going to the door.*] It's that frightful tease.

[*She opens the door and* TRIST *enters, carrying his hat, gloves, and walking-stick.*

TRIST.

Ladies, I have reason to believe that several choice specimens of the *Dianthus Caryophyllus* refuse to raise their heads until you grace the flower-show with your presence.

[JOYCE *slaps his hand playfully and disappears.* HELEN *takes her hat from the round table and standing before the mirror at the mantelpiece, pins it on her head.* TRIST *watches her.*

HELEN.

[*After a silence, her back to* TRIST.] The glass reflects more than one face, Mr. Trist.

TRIST.

[*Moving.*] I beg your pardon.

HELEN.

You were thinking——?

TRIST.

Philosophizing—observing your way of putting on your hat.

HELEN.

I put it on carelessly?

TRIST.

Quickly. A convincing sign of youth. After you are five-and-twenty the process will take at least ten minutes.

HELEN.

And at thirty?

TRIST.

Half an hour. Add another half-hour for each succeeding decade——

HELEN.

[*Turning to him.*] I'm afraid you're a knowing, worldly parson.

TRIST.

[*Laughing.*] No, no; a tolerant, human parson.

HELEN.

We shall see. [*Picking up her gloves.*] If ever you get a living in London, Mr. Trist, I shall make a point of sitting under you.

TRIST.

I bind you to that.

HELEN.

[*Pulling on a glove.*] By-the-bye, I set out to seek *my* London living to-morrow.

TRIST.

[*With a change of manner.*] To-morrow?

HELEN.

To-morrow.

TRIST.

[*Blankly.*] I—I'm sorry.

HELEN.

Very polite of you. I'm glad.

TRIST.

Glad?

HELEN.

It sounds rather unkind, doesn't it? Oh, I'm extremely fond of everybody in this house—Mr. and Mrs. Tad and the children, I mean. But I'm sure it isn't good, morally, for me to be here, even if there were no other reasons for my departure.

TRIST.

Morally?

HELEN.

Yes; if I remained here, all that's bad in my nature would come out on top. Do you know that I've the makings in me of a most accomplished liar and hypocrite?

TRIST.

I shouldn't have suspected it.

HELEN.

I have. [*Coming nearer to him.*] What do you think takes place this afternoon?

TRIST.

What?

HELEN.

[*With gradually increasing excitement.*] There's to be a meeting of the Mortimore family at James Mortimore's house at four o'clock. He and his brother Stephen have just informed me, with the delicacy which is characteristic of them, that they are going to arrange with the lawyers to administer my father's estate without any more delay. And I was double-faced enough to receive the news smilingly and agreeably, and all the time I could have struck them—I could have seen them drop dead in this room without a pang of regret——

TRIST.

No, no——

HELEN.

I could. [*Walking away and pacing the room on the left.*] Oh, it isn't father's money I covet. I said so to the family in Linchpool and I say it again. But I deceived myself.

TRIST.

Deceived yourself?

HELEN.

Deceived myself. I can't *bear* that father should have forgotten me. I can't bear it; I can't resign myself to it; I shall never resign myself to it. I thought I should be able to, but I was mistaken. I told Mr. Thaddeus that I've been suffering no suspense this last month. It's a falsehood; I've been suffering intense suspense. I've been watching the posts, for letters from Elkin; I've been praying, daily, hourly, that something—anything—might be found to prove that father had remembered me. And I loathe these people, who step over me and stand between me and the being I loved best on earth; I loathe them. I detest the whole posse of them, except the Thaddeuses; and I wish this money may bring them, and those belonging to them, every ill that's conceivable. [*Confronting* TRIST, *her bosom heaving.*] Don't you lecture me.

TRIST.

[*Good-humoredly.*] I haven't the faintest intention of doing so.

HELEN.

Ha! [*At the piano, mimicking* JAMES.] Here's Gordon Street——

TRIST.

Eh?

HELEN.

You come along here, to Albert Terrace—taking in Clark's piano factory——

TRIST.

Who does?

HELEN.

[*Fiercely.*] Here—here's the pub at the corner!

TRIST.

[*Bewildered.*] I—I don't——

HELEN.

[*Speaking to him across the piano.*] James Mortimore is buying land and building a new street in the town.

TRIST.

Really?

HELEN.

And Stephen is putting twelve thousand pounds into his old-fashioned paper, to freshen it up; and the Pontings are moving into a big house in London—near Berkeley Square, as James calls it; and they must needs discuss their affairs in my hearing, brutes that they are! [*Coming to the chair on the left of the table at the end of the piano.*] Oh, thank God, I'm leaving the town to-morrow! It was only a sort of curiosity that brought me here. [*Sitting and producing her handkerchief.*] Thank God, I'm leaving to-morrow!

[*He walks to the window on the right to allow her to recover herself, and then returns to her.*

TRIST.

My dear child, may I speak quite plainly to you?

HELEN.

[*Wiping her eyes.*] If you don't lecture me.

TRIST.

I won't lecture you. I merely venture to suggest that you are a trifle illogical.

HELEN.

I dare say.

TRIST.

After all, recollect, our friends James and Stephen are not to be blamed for the position they find themselves in.

HELEN.

Their manners are insufferable.

TRIST.

Hardly insufferable. Nothing is insufferable.

HELEN.

There you go!

TRIST.

Their faults of manner and breeding are precisely the faults a reasonable, dispassionate person would have no difficulty in excusing. And I shall be much astonished, when the bitterness of your mortification has worn off——

HELEN.

You *are* lecturing!

TRIST.

I'm not; I give you my word I'm not.

HELEN.

It sounds uncommonly like it. What did I tell you the other day—that you were different from the clergymen I'd met hitherto, because you were——?

TRIST.

Jolly.

HELEN.

[*With a shrug.*] Jolly! [*Wearily.*] Oh, please go and hurry the children up, and let's be off to the flowers.

TRIST.

[*Not stirring.*] My dear Miss Thornhill——

HELEN.

[*Impatiently.*] I'll fetch them——

TRIST.

Don't. [*Deliberately.*] My dear Miss Thornhill, to show you how little I regard myself as worthy of the privilege of lecturing you; [*smiling*] to show you how the seeds of selfishness may germinate and flourish even in the breast of a cleric—may I make a confession to you?

HELEN.

Confession——?

TRIST.

I—I want to confess to you that the circumstance of your having been left as you are—cast adrift on the world, unprotected, without means apart from your own talent and exertions—is one that fills me with—hope.

HELEN.

Hope?

TRIST.

Fills me with hope, though it may scarcely justify my presumption. [*Sitting opposite to her.*] You were assuming a minute ago, in joke perhaps, the possibility of my obtaining a living some day.

HELEN.

[*Graciously, but with growing uneasiness.*] Not altogether in joke.

TRIST.

Anyhow, there *is* a decided possibility of a living coming my way—and practically in London, as it chances.

HELEN.

I—I'm pleased.

TRIST.

Yes, in the natural order of events a living will be vacant within the next few years which is in the gift of the father of an old college chum of mine. It's a suburban parish—close to Twickenham—and I'm promised it.

HELEN.

That would be—nice for you.

TRIST.

[*Gazing at her fixedly.*] Jolly.

HELEN.

[*Her eyes drooping.*] Very—jolly.

TRIST.

I should still be a poor man—that I shall always be; but poverty is relative. It would be riches compared with my curacy here. [*After a pause.*] The vicarage has a garden with some grand old trees.

HELEN.

Many of the old gardens—in the suburbs—are charming.

TRIST.

I—I could let the vicarage during the summer, to increase my income.

HELEN.

May a vicar—let—his vicarage?

TRIST.

It's done. Some Bishops object to it; [*innocently*] but you can dodge the old boy.

HELEN.

Dodge the—old boy!

TRIST.

There are all sorts of legal fictions to help you. I know of a Bishop's son-in-law who let his vicarage for a term under the pretence of letting only the furniture.

HELEN.

Wicked.

TRIST.

[*Leaning forward.*] But I shouldn't dream of letting my vicarage if my income—proved sufficient——

HELEN.

It would be wealth—you say—in comparison——

TRIST.

Yes, but I—I might—marry.

HELEN.

[*Hastily.*] Oh—oh, of course.

[*The door opens and* JOYCE *and* CYRIL *enter, dressed for going out.* CYRIL *is in his best suit, is gloved, and swings a cane which is too long for him. At the same moment* THADDEUS *lets himself into the garden at the gate. He is accompanied by* DENYER, *an ordinary-looking person with whiskers and moustache.* HELEN *and* TRIST *rise, and she goes to the mirror in some confusion and gives a last touch to her hat.*

JOYCE.

Have we kept you waiting?

CYRIL.

Sorry. Couldn't get my tie to go right.

THADDEUS.

[*In the garden.*] Come in, Denyer. [*At the window, to those in the room.*] What, haven't you folks gone yet?

TRIST.

[*With the children, following* HELEN *into the garden.*] Just off.

THADDEUS.

[*To* HELEN, *as she passes him.*] Hope you'll enjoy yourself.

TRIST.

[*To* DENYER.] Ah, Mr. Denyer, how are you?

DENYER.

How are you, Mr. Trist?

JOYCE *and* CYRIL.

[*To* THADDEUS.] Good-bye, father.

THADDEUS.

[*Kissing them.*] Good-bye, my dears.

[TRIST *opens the gate and* HELEN *and the children pass out into the lane.* TRIST *follows them, closing the gate.* THADDEUS *and* DENYER *enter the room.* DENYER *is carrying a newspaper.*

CYRIL.

[*Out of sight, shrilly.*] Which way?

TRIST.

Through Parker Street.

JOYCE.

Who walks with who?

HELEN.

I walk with Cyril.

[*The sound of the chatter dies in the distance.*

DENYER.

[*To* THADDEUS.] Then I can put up the bill at once, Mr. Mortimore?

THADDEUS.

[*Laying his hat upon the table on the left.*] Do, Denyer. To-morrow—to-day——

DENYER.

I'll send a man round in the morning. [*Producing a note-book and writing in it.*] Let's see—your lease is seven, fourteen, twenty-one?

THADDEUS.

That's it.

DENYER.

How much of the first seven is there to run—I ought to remember——?

THADDEUS.

Two years and a half from Michaelmas.

DENYER.

Rent?

THADDEUS.

Forty.

[*The door opens a little way and* PHYLLIS *peeps in. Her features are drawn, her lips white and set.*

DENYER.

Fixtures at a valuation, I s'pose?

THADDEUS.

Ha, ha! The costly fixtures at a valuation.

DENYER.

You may as well sell 'em, if they only fetch tuppence. [*Seeing* PHYLLIS, *who has entered softly.*] Good-afternoon, ma'am.

PHYLLIS.

[*In a low voice.*] Good-afternoon.

THADDEUS.

[*Turning to her.*] Phyl, dear! I met Mr. Denyer in the lane. [*Gleefully.*] The bill goes up to-morrow—"house to let"—to-morrow morning—[*to* DENYER] first thing——

[PHYLLIS *moves to the bay-window without speaking.*

DENYER.

First thing. [*Putting his pocketbook away.*] Excuse me —you're on the lookout for a new residence?

THADDEUS.

Oh—er—one must live somewhere, Denyer.

DENYER.

And a much superior house to *this,* Mr. Mortimore, I lay a guinea.

THADDEUS.

[*Walking about with his hands in his pockets.*] The children are springing up—getting to be tremendous people.

DENYER.

[*Genially.*] Oh, come, sir! *We* know.

THADDEUS.

[*Pausing in his walk.*] Eh?

DENYER.

Everybody in the town knows of your luck, and the family's. [*Picking up his hat and newspaper, which he has laid upon the ottoman.*] Here's another allusion to it in this week's *Courier.*

THADDEUS.

The *Courier?*

DENYER.

[*Handing him the paper.*] Just out. You keep it; I've got another at 'ome. [THADDEUS *is searching the paper.*] Middle page—"Town Topics."

THADDEUS.

Thanks.

DENYER.

Mr. Hammond—he will poke his fun. [*Going to the window.*] P'r'aps you'll give us a call, sir?

THADDEUS.

[*Following him absently, reading.*] Yes, I'll call in.

DENYER.

[*To* PHYLLIS, *who is sitting in the chair by the bay-window.*] Good-day, ma'am. [*In the garden, to* THADDEUS, *persuasively.*] Now, you won't forget Gibson and Denyer, Mr. Mortimore?

THADDEUS.

[*At the window.*] I won't; I won't.

DENYER.

The old firm. [*Opening the gate.*] What we haven't got on our books isn't worth considering, you take it from me.

[*He disappears, closing the gate.* THADDEUS *comes back into the room.*

THADDEUS.

Upon my soul, this is too bad of Hammond. This'll annoy Jim and Stephen frightfully—drive 'em mad. [*Flinging the paper on to the settee by the piano.*] Oh, well——! [*Putting his necktie in order at the mirror.*] By Jove, we've done it at last, old lady! "House to let," hey? I believe I'm

keener about it than you are, now it's come to it. What a sensation it'll cause at "Ivanhoe," and at the Crescent! I tell you what, you and I must have a solemn talk to-night —a parliament—when the children have gone to bed; a regular, serious talk. [*Turning.*] You know, I'm still for Cheltenham. Cheltenham seems to me to offer so many advantages. [PHYLLIS *rises slowly.*] There's the town itself—bright and healthy; then the College, for Cyril. As for its musical tastes—— [*Breaking off and looking at the clock.*] I say, do get your things on, Phyl. [*Comparing his watch with the clock and then timing and winding it.*] We shall catch it if we're not punctual.

PHYLLIS.

I—I'm not going, Tad.

THADDEUS.

Not going, dear?

PHYLLIS.

No—I—— [*He advances to the right of the piano solicitously.*] I *can't* go.

THADDEUS.

Aren't you up to it?

[*She moves to the open window and looks into the garden.*

PHYLLIS.

They won't—be back—for a long while?

THADDEUS.

The children, and Trist and Helen? Not for an hour or two.

PHYLLIS.

[*Turning.*] Tad—that girl—that girl——

THADDEUS.

Helen?

PHYLLIS.

[*Coming forward a little.*] We're robbing her; we're robbing her. [*Shaking.*] We're all robbing her.

THADDEUS.

[*At her side.*] You've got another bad attack of nerves this afternoon—an extra bad one——

PHYLLIS.

[*Suddenly, grasping his coat.*] Tad—I—I've broken down——

THADDEUS.

Broken down?

PHYLLIS.

I've broken down under it. I—I can't endure it.

THADDEUS.

[*Soothingly.*] What—what——?

PHYLLIS.

Your brother—Edward—your brother—Edward——

THADDEUS.

Yes?

PHYLLIS.

Everything—everything—belongs to her—Helen——

THADDEUS.

My dear, the family were prepared to offer Helen——

PHYLLIS.

No, no! He left every penny to her—*left* it to her. [*Staring into his face.*] There was a will.

THADDEUS.

A will?

PHYLLIS.

I saw it.

THADDEUS.

You saw it?

PHYLLIS.

I read it—I had it in my hand——

THADDEUS.

[*Incredulously.*] *You* did!

PHYLLIS.

Yes, I—I did away with it——

THADDEUS.

Did away with it?

PHYLLIS.

Destroyed it.

THADDEUS.

A will—Ned's will——! [*She turns from him and sinks helplessly on to the settee by the fireplace. He stands looking down upon her in a half-frightened, half-puzzled way; then his face clears and he looks at the clock again. Calmly.*] Phyl, I wish you'd let me have Chapman in.

PHYLLIS.

[*In a faint voice.*] No—no——

THADDEUS.

My dear, we can afford a doctor now, if we require one. That bromide stuff he prescribed for you once—that did you no end of good. [*Going towards the door.*] I'll send Kate.

PHYLLIS.

[*Raising herself.*] Tad——

THADDEUS.

[*Reassuringly.*] I'll stay with you till he comes.

PHYLLIS.

Tad—[*getting to her feet*] you—you think I'm not right in my head. Tad, I—I know what I'm saying. I'm telling the truth. I'm telling you the truth.

THADDEUS.

A will——?

PHYLLIS.

[*At the round table.*] Yes—yes——

THADDEUS.

No, no, you're talking nonsense. [*He goes to the door and there pauses, his hand on the door-knob.*] When—when——?

PHYLLIS.

When——?

THADDEUS.

When did you see it?

PHYLLIS.

On the—on the Wednesday night.

THADDEUS.

The Wednesday night?

PHYLLIS.

You remember—the night there was no night nurse——?

THADDEUS.

I remember, of course.

PHYLLIS.

Ann and Louisa had gone to the hotel to lie down, and —and I was alone with him.

THADDEUS.

I remember it all perfectly.

PHYLLIS.

[*Moving towards the ottoman, supporting herself by the table.*] I was with him from eight o'clock till nearly eleven.

THADDEUS.

Till the others came back. That was the night he—the night he sank.

PHYLLIS.

Yes; it was just before then that he—that he——

THADDEUS.

[*Leaving the door.*] Just before then——?

PHYLLIS.

It was just before the change set in that he—that he sent me down-stairs.

THADDEUS.

Down-stairs?

PHYLLIS.

To the library.

THADDEUS.

The library?

PHYLLIS.

With the keys.

THADDEUS.

Keys?

PHYLLIS.

His bunch of keys.

THADDEUS.

Sent you down-stairs—to the library—with his keys?

PHYLLIS.

Yes.

THADDEUS.

What for?

PHYLLIS.

To fetch something.

THADDEUS.

Fetch something?

PHYLLIS.

From the safe.

THADDEUS.

The safe?

PHYLLIS.

The safe in the library—[*sitting on the ottoman*] the safe in the bookcase in the library.

THADDEUS.

[*Coming to her.*] What—what did he send you to fetch, dear?

PHYLLIS.

Some—some jewelry.

THADDEUS.

Jewelry?

PHYLLIS.

Some pieces of jewelry. He had some pieces of jewelry in his safe in the library, that he'd picked up, he said, at odd times, and he wanted to make me a present of one of them—

THADDEUS.

Make you a present——?

PHYLLIS.

As a keepsake. [*Her elbows on her knees, digging her fingers into her hair.*] It was about half-past nine. I was sitting beside his bed, thinking he was asleep, and I found him looking at me. He recollected seeing me when I was a child, he said, skating on the ponds at Claybrook; and he said he was sure I—I was a good wife to you—and a good mother to my children. And then he spoke of the jewelry—and opened the drawer of the table by the bed—and took out his keys—and explained to me how to open the safe.

THADDEUS.

[*His manner gradually changing as he listens to her recital.*] You—you went down——?

PHYLLIS.

Yes.

THADDEUS.

And—and——?

PHYLLIS.

And unlocked the safe. And in the lower drawer I—I came across it.

THADDEUS.

Came across——?

PHYLLIS.

He told me I should find four small boxes—and I could find only three—and that made me look into the drawer—and—and under a lot of other papers—I—I saw it.

THADDEUS.

It?

PHYLLIS.

A big envelope, with "My Will" written upon it.

[*There is a short silence; then he seats himself upon the settee by the piano.*

THADDEUS.

[*In a whisper.*] Well?

PHYLLIS.

[*Raising her head.*] I put it back into the drawer, and locked the safe, and went up-stairs with the jewelry. Outside the bedroom door I found Heath. I'd given him permission to run out for an hour, to get some air, with Pearce and Sadler, the housemaids. He asked me if they could do anything for me before they started. I told him no, and that Mr. Mortimore seemed brighter and stronger. I heard him going down the servant's staircase; and then I went into the room—up to the bed—and—and he was altered.

THADDEUS.

[*Moistening his lips with his tongue.*] Ned——?

PHYLLIS.

His cheeks were more shrunken, and his jaw had dropped slightly, and his lips were quite blue; and his breathing was short and quick. I measured the medicine which he was to have if there was any sign of collapse, and lifted him up and gave it to him. Then I rang the bell, and by and by the woman from the kitchen answered it. He was easier then —dozing, but I told her to put on her hat and jacket and go for Dr. Oswald. And then I stood watching him, and —and the idea—came to me.

THADDEUS.

The—the idea?

PHYLLIS.

My head suddenly became very clear. Every word of the argument in the train came back to me——

THADDEUS.

Argument?

PHYLLIS.

Between James and the others—in the train, going to Linchpool, on the Tuesday——

THADDEUS.

Oh—oh, yes.

PHYLLIS.

If Edward died, how much would he die worth? Who would come in for all his money? Would he remember the family, to the extent of a mourning ring or so, in his will? If he should die leaving *no* will! Of course Ned would leave a will, but—where did a man's money go to when he *didn't* leave a will?

THADDEUS.

[*Under his breath.*] To his—next-of-kin——!

PHYLLIS.

[*Rising painfully.*] After a time, I—I went downstairs again. At first I persuaded myself that I only wanted to replace the jewelry—that I didn't want to have to explain about the jewelry to Ann and Lou; [*moving about the room on the left*] but when I got down-stairs I *knew* what I was going to do. And I did it as if it was the most ordinary

thing in the world. I put back the little boxes—and took out the big envelope—and locked up the safe again, and—read the will. [*Pausing at the piano.*] Everything—everything—to some person—some woman living in Paris. [*Leaning upon the piano, a clenched hand against her brow.*] "Everything I die possessed of to Helen Thornhill, now or late of——" such-and-such an address, "spinster, absolutely"; and she was to be his executrix—"sole executrix." That was all, except that he begged her to reward his old servants—his old servants at his house and at the brewery. Just a few lines—on one side of a sheet of paper——

THADDEUS.

Written—in his own—hand?

PHYLLIS.

I think so.

THADDEUS.

You—you've seen his writing—since——

PHYLLIS.

[*Leaving the piano.*] Yes—I'm sure—in his own hand.

THADDEUS.

[*Heartily.*] That clears it up, then.

PHYLLIS.

Yes.

THADDEUS.

He'd made his will—himself—himself——

PHYLLIS.

[*Her strength failing a little.*] Three years ago. I—noticed the date—[*dropping into the chair on the extreme left*] it was three years ago——

[*Again there is a silence; then he rises and walks about aimlessly.*

THADDEUS.

[*Trying to collect his thoughts.*] Yes—yes; this clears it up. This clears it all up. There *was* a will. There *was* a will. He *didn't* forget his child; he didn't forget her. What fools—what fools we were to suppose he *could* have forgotten his daughter!

PHYLLIS.

[*Writhing in her chair.*] Oh, I didn't know—I didn't guess——! His daughter! [*Moaning.*] Oh! oh!

THADDEUS.

Don't; don't, old lady. [*She continues her moaning.*] Oh, don't, don't! Let's think; let's think, now; let's think. [*He seats himself opposite to her.*] Now, let's think. Helen—this'll put Helen in a different position entirely; a different position entirely—won't it? I—I wonder—I wonder what's the proper course for the family to take. [*Stretching out a trembling hand to her.*] You'll have to write down—to write down carefully—very carefully—[*breaking off, with a change of tone*] Phyl——

PHYLLIS.

Oh! oh!

THADDEUS.

Don't, dear, don't! Phyllis, perhaps you—didn't—destroy the will; not—actually—destroy it? [*Imploringly.*] You didn't destroy it, dear!

PHYLLIS.

I did—I did——

THADDEUS.

[*Leaning back in his chair, dazed.*] I—I'm afraid—it—it's rather—a serious matter—to—to destroy——

PHYLLIS.

[*Starting up.*] I did destroy it; I did destroy it. [*Pacing the room on the right.*] I kept it—I'd have burnt it then and there if there'd been a fire—but I kept it—I grew terrified at what I'd done—oh, I kept it till you left me at Roper's on the Thursday morning; and then I—I went on to the Ford Street bridge—and tore it into pieces—and threw them into the water. [*Wringing her hands.*] Oh! oh!

THADDEUS.

[*His chin on his breast.*] Well—well—we've got to go through with it. We've got—to go—through—— [*Rising and walking about unsteadily on the left.*] Yes, yes, yes; what a difference it'll make to everybody—not only to Helen! What a difference it'll make at "Ivanhoe," and at the Crescent—and to Rose——!

PHYLLIS.

They'll curse me! They'll curse me more than ever!

THADDEUS.

And to—to *us!*

PHYLLIS.

To us—the children——!

THADDEUS.

[*Shaking a finger at her across the piano, cunningly.*] Ah—ah—ah, but when the affair's really settled, we'll still carry out our intention. We—we'll still——

PHYLLIS.

[*Facing him.*] Our intention? Our——?

THADDEUS.

Our intention—of leaving the town——

PHYLLIS.

[*Wildly.*] Leaving the town! Oh, my God, we shall *have* to leave the town!

THADDEUS.

[*Recoiling.*] Oh——!

PHYLLIS.

Leave it as beggars and outcasts!

THADDEUS.

[*Quietly.*] Oh, yes, we shall—*have*—to leave the town —now——

[*The door opens and a little maid-servant enters.* THADDEUS *looks at her with dull eyes.*

THE SERVANT.

Please, sir——

THADDEUS.

Eh?

THE SERVANT.

Maud's just come down from "Ivanhoe." They're waiting for you.

THADDEUS.

W—waiting?

THE SERVANT.

That's the message, sir. Mr. James and the family's waiting for Mr. Thaddeus.

THADDEUS.

Oh, I—— [*Taking out his watch and fingering it.*] Yes, of course—[*to the servant*] I—I'm coming up. [*The servant withdraws.* THADDEUS *picks up his hat from the table on the left and turns to* PHYLLIS.] Good-bye, dear. [*Taking her in his arms, and kissing her, simply.*] I—I'll go up.

[*He puts his hat on, finds his way to the door with uncertain steps, and disappears.*

END OF THE SECOND ACT

THE THIRD ACT

The scene is the dining-room in JAMES MORTIMORE'S *house. In the wall facing the spectator there is an arched recess with a fireplace at the back of it, and on either side of the fireplace, within the recess, there is a chimney-seat. On the right of the recess a door opens into the room from a hall or passage.*

Standing out in the middle of the room is a large, oblong dining-table, uncovered. On the table are a couple of inkstands, some pens, paper, and blotting-paper. Ten chairs are placed at regular intervals at the table—three at each side and two at the ends. Against the wall on the right, near the door, stands a heavy side-board. On it are several pieces of ugly-looking, showy plate, a carafe of water and a tumbler, and, upon a tray, a decanter of red wine and some wine-glasses. Against the same wall, but nearer to the spectator, there is a cabinet. In front of the cabinet there is a round table, covered with a white cloth, on which tea-cups and saucers are laid for ten persons. Also on the table are a tea-caddy and teapot, a plated kettle-stand, a plum-cake, and other accompaniments of afternoon tea. On each side of the tea-table there is an armchair belonging to the same set of chairs that surround the dining-table.

Against the left-hand wall is another heavy piece of furniture. Except for this, and the sideboard and the cabinet, the walls, below the dado rail, are bare.

The architecture, decorations, and furniture are pseudo-artistic and vulgar. The whole suggests the home of a common person of moderate means who has built himself a "fine house."

JAMES *and* STEPHEN *are seated at the further side of the dining-table with a newspaper spread out before them. Standing by them, reading the paper over their husbands' shoulders, are* ANN *and* LOUISA. ROSE *is sitting, looking bored, at the right-hand end of the table, and* PONTING, *smoking a cigar, is pacing the room on the left.* LOUISA *and* ROSE, *the latter dressed in rich half-mourning, are wearing their hats.*

JAMES.

[*Scowling at the paper.*] It's infamous.

LOUISA.

Abominable!

ANN.

It oughtn't to be allowed, James.

STEPHEN.

Ah, now James is stabbed at as well as myself.

JAMES.

The man's a blackguard; that's what he is.

LOUISA.

His wife's a most unpleasant woman

STEPHEN.

[*Leaning back and wiping his spectacles.*] Hitherto *I* have been the chief object of Mr. Hammond's malice.

LOUISA.

You'll soon have your revenge now, Stephen. [*To the others.*] Stephen will soon have his revenge now.

JAMES.

By George, I've half a mind to ask Vallance to give me his opinion on this!

STEPHEN.

We might consult Vallance, certainly.

LOUISA.

And tell him what Mrs. Hammond *was*.

ANN.

When she was plain Nelly Robson.

STEPHEN.

Sssh, sssh! Do, pray, keep the wife out of it.

PONTING.

[*Looking at his watch as he walks across to the right.*] I say, my friends, it's four o'clock, you know. [*The* MORTIMORES *stiffen themselves and regard him coldly.*] Where are these lawyer chaps?

JAMES.

[*Folding the newspaper.*] They're not in my pocket, Colonel.

STEPHEN.

No, we're not in the habit of carrying them about with us.

LOUISA.

[*Laughing sillily.*] Oh, Stephen!

ROSE.

We mustn't lose the—what's the train back, Toby?

PONTING.

[*Behind her chair, annoyed.*] Five fifty-seven.

ROSE.

I shall be dead with fatigue; I've two parties to-night.

JAMES.

Parties?

ROSE.

[*To* PONTING.] Destinn is singing at the Trench's, Toby.

STEPHEN.

[*Rising.*] H'm! Indeed?

ANN.

[*In an undertone, withdrawing with* LOUISA *to the fireplace.*] Singing!

JAMES.

[*Rising.*] So you're going to parties, are you, Rose? Pretty sharp work, with Ned only a month in his grave.

PONTING.

We're not conventional people.

ROSE.

[*Rising and walking away to the left.*] No, we don't mourn openly.

PONTING.

We don't carry our hearts on our what-d'ye-call-it—sleeve.

ROSE.

And Edward wasn't in the least known in London society.

JAMES.

[*Walking about on the right.*] *You* knew him.

PONTING.

[*Seating himself on the nearer side of the dining-table in the middle chair.*] In London, my friends, reg'lar mournin' is confined to the suburbs nowadays. May I have an ash-tray?

ROSE.

[*Walking about on the left.*] And we go to Harrogate on the twenty-ninth.

PONTING.

Good Lord, yes; I'm kept devilish quiet *there.*

[ANN *takes a metal ash-tray from the mantelpiece and gives it to* STEPHEN, *who almost flings it on to the table. The door opens and a maid-servant enters followed by* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE. *The lawyers carry small leather bags. The servant retires.*

JAMES.

[*Shaking hands heartily with* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE.] Here you are!

ELKIN.

A minute or two behind time—my fault.

STEPHEN.

How d'ye do, Mr. Elkin? [*Shaking hands with* VALLANCE.] Good-afternoon.

ELKIN.

[*To* PONTING.] How d'ye do?

PONTING.

[*Shortly, not rising.*] H'ah you?

VALLANCE.

[*Shaking hands with* ANN *and* LOUISA *and bowing to* ROSE.] How do you do?

ELKIN.

[*To* ROSE.] Hope you're very well, Mrs. Ponting.

ROSE.

Thanks.

VALLANCE.

[*To* PONTING, *who nods in return.*] Good-afternoon.

PONTING.

[*Bringing the palm of his hand down upon the table.*] Now, then!

JAMES.

[*To* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE, *inviting them by a gesture to be seated.*] Excuse the dining-room, gentlemen; looks more like business than the drawing-room.

STEPHEN.

[*On the left.*] Where's Tad?

ANN.

[*Seating herself at the further side of the dining-table in the middle chair.*] Yes, where's Tad?

LOUISA.

[*Sitting beside her.*] Where are Tad and Phyllis?

JAMES.

[*Looking at his watch.*] Five past, by my watch.

ROSE.

[*Sitting at the left-hand end of the table.*] Oh, never mind *them.*

JAMES.

[*To* STEPHEN.] P'r'aps you told 'em four-thirty?

STEPHEN.

[*Nettled.*] Perhaps *I* told them!

JAMES.

All right, all right; don't flare up! P'r'aps *I* did; there *was* a talk of making it half-past.

STEPHEN.

[*Raising his arms.*] On the day I go to press——

JAMES.

Ring the bell. [*Opening the door and calling.*] Maud! Maud!——

[STEPHEN *rings the bell.* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE *are now seated,* ELKIN *in the further chair at the right-hand end of the dining-table,* VALLANCE *in the chair between* ELKIN *and* ANN. *They open their bags and sort and arrange their papers.*

PONTING.

We shall be here till midnight.

JAMES.

Maud——!

ROSE.

[*Pushing her chair away from the table.*] How vexing!

PONTING.

[*With a sneer.*] I suppose one can buy a soot of pyjamas in the town, eh, Mrs. James?

ELKIN.

I sha'n't detain you long.

[*The servant appears at the door.*

JAMES.

Maud, run down to Nelson Villas—just as you are——

ROSE.

[*Satirically.*] Don't hurry them, Jim. Phyllis is smartening herself up.

STEPHEN.

[*Seating himself in the further chair at the left-hand end of the dining-table, loudly.*] Say we are waiting for Mr. Thaddeus.

JAMES.

[*To the girl.*] Mr. James and the family are waiting for Mr. Thaddeus. [*As he closes the door.*] Go along Collier Street; you may meet him.

PONTING.

[*Fussily.*] We can deal with preliminaries, at any rate. Kindly push that ash-tray a little nearer. [*To* VALLANCE.] Mr. Vallance——

JAMES.

[*Leaving the door, resenting* PONTING'S *assumption of authority.*] I beg your pardon, Colonel; we'll give my brother another five minutes' grace, with your permission.

PONTING.

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*] By all means — ten — twenty——

JAMES.

[*Finding that he has the newspaper in his hand.*] Oh— here——! [*Opening the paper.*] While we're waiting for Tad——

STEPHEN.

Ah, yes. Read it aloud, Jim.

PONTING.

[*Rising and moving away impatiently.*] Tsch!

JAMES.

Mr. Vallance—Mr. Elkin—oblige us by listening to this. It's from the *Courier*.

STEPHEN.

This week's *Courier*—published to-day——

VALLANCE.

[*To* ELKIN.] One of our local papers.

JAMES.

Owned by a feller o' the name of Hammond. [*Reading.*] "Town Topics."

ANN.

He married a Miss Robson.

LOUISA.

A dreadful woman.

STEPHEN.

Sssh, sssh! Mr. Hammond's offensive remarks are usually directed against *myself*, but in this instance——

JAMES.

[*Walking about as he reads.*] "A curious complication arises in connection with the estate of the late Mr. Edward Mortimore of Linchpool."

STEPHEN.

He doesn't cloak his attack, you see.

JAMES.

"As many of our readers are aware—[*running his hands over his pockets*] as many of our readers are aware——"

STEPHEN.

He has *made* them aware of it.

JAMES.

[*To* ANN.] Where did I put them, mother?

ANN.

[*Producing her spectacles.*] Try mine, James.

[ANN *gives her spectacles to* STEPHEN, STEPHEN *gives them to* ROSE, *and* ROSE *presents them to* JAMES.

JAMES.

I'm getting as blear-eyed as Stephen. [*Resuming.*] "As many of our readers are aware, the whole of that gentleman's wealth passes, in consequence of his having died intestate, to a well-known Singlehampton family——"

LOUISA.

That points to us.

STEPHEN.

[*Irritably.*] Of course it does; of course it does.

LOUISA.

There's no better-known family in Singlehampton than ours.

STEPHEN.

Sssh, sssh!

JAMES.

"——two members of which——"

ANN.

The Mockfords were an older family—but where *are* the Mockfords?

JAMES.

[*To* ANN.] Give me a chance, Ann. [*Continuing.*] "——two members of which have been for many years prominently associated with the temperance movement in this town."

STEPHEN.

[*Rising.*] My brother James and myself.

JAMES.

[*Standing at the table, facing* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE, *in his oratorical manner.*] Twelve years ago, gentlemen, I was instrumental in founding the Singlehampton and Claybrook Temperance League——

LOUISA.

Stephen was another of the founders.

STEPHEN.

[*Joining* JAMES.] I was another.

JAMES.

And day in and day out I have devoted my best energies to furthering the objects of the League in Singlehampton *and* in Claybrook.

STEPHEN.

Very materially aided by the *Times and Mirror,* a temperance organ.

JAMES.

And I submit that it's holding us up to ridicule and contempt—holding us up to public obloquy and derision——

VALLANCE.

[*To* JAMES.] What is your objection to the paragraph, Mr. Mortimore?

JAMES.

Objection!

ELKIN.

There's more to come, I expect.

JAMES.

[*Grimly.*] Aye, a bit more. [*Sitting at the table.*] What d'ye think of this? [*Reading.*] "When it is remembered that the late Mr. Mortimore's fortune was derived from the brewing and the sale of *beer*——"

STEPHEN.

[*Sitting beside* JAMES.] The word "beer" is in italics.

VALLANCE.

Oh, I see.

JAMES.

"——it will be understood that our two distinguished fellow-townsmen are placed in an extremely difficult position."

STEPHEN.

This is the most spiteful part of it.

JAMES.

"We have no doubt, however, that, as conscientious men, they will prove fully equal to the occasion by either renouncing their share of their late brother's property or by dedicating it entirely to the advancement of the cause they have at heart." [*Throwing the newspaper to* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE.] There it is, gentlemen.

[*In wandering round the room,* PONTING *has come upon the decanter of wine and the wine-glasses standing on the sideboard. He is now filling a glass.*

PONTING.

Every man has a right to his convictions. [*Taking the glass in his hand.*] A little alcohol hurts nobody——

JAMES.

You won't find any in *my* house.

PONTING.

What's this, then?

JAMES.

Currant.

PONTING.

[*Replacing the glass, with a wry face.*] My dear Mortimore——!

[*He sits at the right-hand end of the table, beside* ELKIN, *and pries at the documents which* ELKIN *has taken from his bag.* VALLANCE *and* ELKIN *are reading the paragraph together,* VALLANCE *drawing his chair closer to* ELKIN'S *for that purpose.*

JAMES.

[*To* VALLANCE.] Well, what's your opinion, Mr. Vallance? Is that libellous, or isn't it?

STEPHEN.

Does it, or does it not, go beyond the bounds of fair comment—eh, Mr. Elkin?

VALLANCE.

[*Pacifically.*] Oh, but aren't you attaching a great deal too much importance to this?

JAMES.

Too much——!

ELKIN.

Why not ignore it?

STEPHEN.

Ignore it!

VALLANCE.

Treat it as a piece of pure chaff—badinage——

ELKIN.

In more or less bad taste.

VALLANCE.

Take no notice of it whatever.

JAMES.

[*Rising and walking away to the fireplace.*] Take no notice of it! The townspeople will take notice of it pretty quickly.

STEPHEN.

[*Rising.*] In *my* opinion, that paragraph renders our position in the League absolutely untenable.

JAMES.

[*Standing over* VALLANCE.] Unless that paragraph is apologized for, withdrawn——

STEPHEN.

[*Standing over* ELKIN.] Explained away——

JAMES.

Aye, explained away——

VALLANCE.

I don't see how it can be explained away.

ELKIN.

[*Dryly.*] The proposition is a perfectly accurate one, whatever you may think of the corollary.

VALLANCE.

You *are* ardent advocates of temperance.

ELKIN.

Your late brother's property *was* amassed mainly by beer.

VALLANCE.

It can hardly be explained away.

STEPHEN.

[*Walking to the left.*] Good heavens above, I've explained things away often enough in *my* paper!

JAMES.

[*Coming forward on the right.*] This does us at the League, then—*does* us; knocks our influence into a cocked hat.

ELKIN.

[*To* JAMES *and* STEPHEN, *while* VALLANCE *folds the paper.*] After all, gentlemen, when you come to reflect upon it, the laugh is with *you.*

JAMES.

Is it?

ELKIN.

[*Genially.*] The *Courier* has its little joke, but *you've* got the money, remember.

JAMES.

Oh, that's true.

STEPHEN.

[*Walking about on the left.*] That's true; that's true.

JAMES.

[*Walking about on the right, rattling his loose cash.*] Aye, *we've* got the mopuses.

ROSE.

[*Tilting her chair on its hind legs.*] I say, Jim—Stephen —why don't you two boys, between you, present the League with a handsome hall——?

JAMES.

[*Pausing in his walk.*] Hall?

ROSE.

Build the temperance folk a meeting-place of their own —a headquarters——

PONTING.

[*Mischievously.*] He, he, he! That 'ud smooth 'em down. Capital idea, Rosie!

JAMES *and* STEPHEN.

We!

JAMES.

I'd see 'em damned first. [*To the ladies.*] I beg pardon——

ANN.

[*With unusual animation.*] No, no; you're quite right, James.

STEPHEN.

[*At the fireplace.*] That would be playing into Mr. Hammond's hands with a vengeance.

JAMES.

[*Walking across to the left, derisively.*] Ha! Wouldn't Hammond crow, hey! Ha, ha, ha!

STEPHEN.

No, if the situation becomes too acute—painful as it would be to me—I shall resign.

JAMES.

[*Determinedly.*] Resign.

STEPHEN.

Sever my connection with the League.

JAMES.

Leave 'em to swill themselves with their lemonade and boiled tea——!

STEPHEN.

[*Coming forward on the right.*] And to find out how they get on without us.

JAMES.

Serve 'em up in their own juice!

STEPHEN.

[*Meeting* JAMES *in the middle of the room on the nearer side of the dining-table.*] You know, Jim, we've never gone *quite* so far—you and I—with the principles of temperance as some.

JAMES.

[*Eyeing him curiously.*] Never gone so far——?

STEPHEN.

As old Bob Amphlett, for example—never.

JAMES.

Oh, yes, we have, and a deuced sight further.

STEPHEN.

Excuse me—I've *always* been for moderation rather than for total abstinence.

JAMES.

Have yer? [*Walking away to the left.*] First I've heard of it.

STEPHEN.

Anyhow, a man may broaden his views with years and experience. [*Argumentatively.*] Take the hygienic aspect of the case. Only the other day, Sir Vincent West, probably the ablest physician in England——

LOUISA.

[*Abruptly.*] Stephen——!

STEPHEN.

[*Angrily.*] Don't interrupt me.

LOUISA.

[*With energy, rising.*] I've maintained it throughout my life—it's nothing new from my lips——

STEPHEN.

What——?

LOUISA.

There are two sides to every question.

STEPHEN.

[*Hurrying round the table to join* LOUISA.] Exactly—exactly—as Lou says——

LOUISA.

It's been almost a second religion with me. I've preached it in season and out of season——

STEPHEN.

[*With conviction.*] There *are* two sides——

LOUISA.

Two sides to every question.

JAMES.

[*To* ANN, *pointing to the door.*] Mother—— [*The door has been opened by another maid-servant, who carries a tray on which are a plated kettle, a dish of toast, and a plentiful supply of bread-and-butter. The girl remains in the doorway.* ANN *rises and goes to her and takes the kettle from the tray.* JAMES *comes forward and seats himself on the nearer side of the dining-table in the middle chair.*] Look here; I don't wait another minute for the Tads—not a second.

PONTING.

Ah!

[LOUISA *follows* ANN *and takes the toast and the bread-and-butter from the servant, who then disappears, closing the door.*

STEPHEN.

[*Again sitting in the further chair at the left-hand end of the dining-table.*] Inexcusable of them—inexcusable.

[ANN *and* LOUISA *come to the tea-table and, drawing the two armchairs up to it, seat themselves and prepare the tea. The kettle is set upon the stand, the spirit-lamp is lighted,* ANN *measures the tea from the caddy into the pot, and* LOUISA *cuts the plum-cake.*

JAMES.

Mr. Elkin—Mr. Vallance——

PONTING.

Now, Mr. Vallance; now, Mr. Elkin!

ELKIN.

[*To* VALLANCE.] Will you——?

VALLANCE.

No, no—you——

ELKIN.

Well, gentlemen—[*to* ROSE] Mrs. Ponting—Mr. Vallance and I have to report to you that we've received no communication of any kind in answer to our circulars and advertisements——

JAMES.

[*To* ANN, *who is making a clatter with the kettle.*] Steady, mother!

PONTING.

[*To the ladies at the tea-table.*] Sssh, sssh, sssh!

ELKIN.

No communication from any solicitor who has prepared a will for your late brother, nor from anybody who has knowingly witnessed a will executed by him.

STEPHEN.

Mr. Vallance has apprised us of this already.

JAMES.

[*Raising a hand.*] Order! There's a formal way of doing things and a lax way.

STEPHEN.

I merely mentioned——

[PONTING *raps the table sharply with his knuckles.*

ELKIN.

I may say that, in addition to the issuing of the circulars and advertisements, I have made search in every place I could think of, and have inquired of every person likely to be of help in the matter. In fact, I've taken every possible step to find, or trace, a will.

VALLANCE.

Without success.

ELKIN.

Without success.

JAMES.

[*Magnanimously.*] And *I* say that the family bears no grudge to Mr. Elkin for doing his duty.

STEPHEN.

[*In the same spirit.*] Hear, hear!

PONTING.

[*Testily.*] Of course not; of course not.

ROSE.

It's all the more satisfactory, it seems to me, that he *has* worried round.

JAMES.

The family *thanks* Mr. Elkin.

STEPHEN.

We thank Mr. Elkin.

ELKIN.

[*After a stiff inclination of the head.*] The only other observation I wish to make is that several gentlemen employed in the office of the brewery in Linchpool have at different times witnessed the late Mr. Mortimore's signature to documents which have apparently required the attestation of two witnesses.

PONTING.

[*Curtly.*] That amounts to nothing.

JAMES.

There are a good many documents, aren't there, where two witnesses are required to a signature?

ELKIN.

Deeds under seal, certainly.

STEPHEN.

I remember having to sign, some years ago——

[PONTING *again raps the table.*

VALLANCE.

But none of these gentlemen at the brewery can recall that any particular document appeared to him to be a will, which is not a document under seal.

JAMES.

Besides, a man signing a will always tells the witnesses that it *is* his will they're witnessing, doesn't he, Mr. Vallance?

VALLANCE.

A solicitor would, in the ordinary course of practice, inform the witnesses to a will of the nature of the document they were attesting, undoubtedly.

ELKIN.

Granted; but a testator, supposing he were executing his will in his own house or office, and not in the presence of a solicitor, is under no legal necessity to do so, and may omit to do so.

JAMES.

[*Rolling about in his chair.*] Oh, well, we needn't——

PONTING.

[*Looking at his watch.*] In heaven's name——!

STEPHEN.

We needn't go into all this.

ELKIN.

No, no; I simply draw attention to the point. [*Unfolding a document.*] Well, gentlemen—Mrs. Ponting—this is a statement—[*handing another document to* VALLANCE] here is a copy of it, Mr. Vallance—this is a statement of particulars of stocks, shares, and other items of estate, with their values at the death of the late Mr. Mortimore, and a schedule of the debts so far as they are known to me.

[*There is a general movement.* JAMES *rises and goes to* VALLANCE. STEPHEN *also rises, stretching out an eager hand towards* VALLANCE. ROSE *draws nearer to the table,* PONTING *still closer to* ELKIN. ANN *and* LOUISA, *too, show a disposition to desert the tea-table.*

JAMES.

[*To* ANN, *as he passes her.*] You get on with the tea, mother. [*To* VALLANCE.] Allow me, Mr. Vallance——

[VALLANCE *gives him the duplicate of the statement.*

PONTING.

What's it come out at; what's it come out at?

STEPHEN.

What's it come out at?

ROSE.

Yes, what does it come out at? Jim——

STEPHEN.

Jim——

[JAMES *joins* STEPHEN *and they examine the duplicate together.* ROSE *rises and endeavors to read it with them.*

ELKIN.

I estimate the gross value of the estate, which, as you will see, consists entirely of personal property, at one hundred and ninety-two thousand pounds.

PONTING.

The *gross* value.

STEPHEN.

Yes, but what do *we* get?

PONTING *and* ROSE.

What do *we* get?

JAMES.

After all deductions.

ELKIN.

Roughly speaking, after payment of debts, death duties, and expenses, there will be about a hundred and seventy thousand pounds to divide. [*Those who are standing sit again.* JAMES *seats himself next to* STEPHEN *and, with pen and ink, they make calculations on paper.* PONTING *does the same.* ROSE, *closing her eyes, fans herself happily, and the two ladies at the tea-table resume their preparations with beaming countenances.* ELKIN *leans back in his chair.*] Mr. Vallance——

VALLANCE.

[*To* ROSE, JAMES, *and* STEPHEN.] Mrs. Ponting and gentlemen—[PONTING *raps the table and* JAMES *and* STEPHEN *look up*] I advise you that, as next-of-kin of the late Mr. Mortimore, if you are satisfied—and in my opinion you may reasonably be satisfied—that he died intestate—I advise you that any one or more of you, not exceeding three, [*the door opens quietly and* THADDEUS *appears. He is very pale, but is outwardly calm. After a look in the direction of the table, he closes the door*] may apply for Letters of Administration of your late brother's estate. It isn't necessary or usual, however, I may tell you, to have more than one administrator, and I suggest——

[*Hearing the click of the lock as* THADDEUS *shuts the door, everybody turns and glances at him.*

ROSE.

[*Opening her eyes.*] Here's Tad.

STEPHEN.

[*Grumpily.*] Oh——

ROSE.

[*Tossing* THADDEUS *a greeting.*] Hallo!

JAMES.

[*To* THADDEUS, *with a growl.*] Oh, you've arrived.

STEPHEN.

[*To* THADDEUS.] Did I say four or half-past——?

LOUISA.

Where's Phyllis?

ANN.

Where's Phyllis?

THADDEUS.

[*In a low voice, advancing.*] She—she didn't feel well enough——

[PONTING *raps the inkstand with his penholder.*

JAMES.

[*Pointing to the chair beside him, imperatively.*] Sit down; sit down. [THADDEUS *sits, his elbows on the table, his eyes cast down.*] Mr. Vallance——

VALLANCE.

[*To* THADDEUS.] Good-afternoon, Mr. Mortimore.

ELKIN.

[*Nodding to* THADDEUS.] How d'ye do?

THADDEUS.

[*Almost inaudibly.*] Good-afternoon.

VALLANCE.

[*To the others.*] I suppose we needn't go back——?

A MURMUR.

No, no; no, no.

JAMES.

[*Pushing the duplicate of the statement under* THADDEUS'S *eyes.*] A hundred and seventy thousand pounds to divide.

STEPHEN.

A hundred and seventy thousand.

PONTING.

[*Finishing his sum.*] Forty-two thousand five hundred apiece.

VALLANCE.

[*Resuming.*] I was saying that it isn't usual to have more than one administrator, and I was about to suggest that the best course will be for you, Mr. James, to act in that capacity, and for you, Mr. Stephen, and you, Mr. Thaddeus, or one of you, and Colonel Ponting, to be the sureties to the bond for the due administration of the estate.

JAMES.

[*Cheerfully.*] I'm in your hands, Mr. Vallance.

STEPHEN.

I'm agreeable.

PONTING.

And I.

VALLANCE.

The procedure is this—perhaps I'd better explain it. [*Producing a form of "Oath for Administrators" which is among his papers.*] The intended administrator will make an affidavit stating when and where the deceased died, that he died intestate, [THADDEUS *looks up*] a bachelor without a parent, and that the deponent is a natural and lawful brother and one of the next-of-kin of the deceased——

THADDEUS.

[*Touching* VALLANCE'S *arm.*] Mr. Vallance——

VALLANCE.

Eh?

THADDEUS.

We—we mustn't go on with this.

VALLANCE.

I beg pardon?

THADDEUS.

The family mustn't go on with this.

VALLANCE.

Mustn't go on——?

JAMES.

[*To* THADDEUS.] What a'yer talking about?

THADDEUS.

[*After a hurried look round.*] There—there was a will.

VALLANCE.

A will?

THADDEUS.

He—he made a will.

JAMES.

Who did?

THADDEUS.

Edward. He—he left a will.

JAMES.

[*Roughly.*] What the——!

ELKIN.

[*To* JAMES, *interrupting him.*] One moment. Your brother has something to say to us, Mr. Mortimore.

STEPHEN.

What—what's he mean by——?

ELKIN.

[*To* STEPHEN.] Please—[*To* THADDEUS.] Yes, sir? [THADDEUS *is silent.*] *What* about a will? [THADDEUS *is still silent.*] Eh?

THADDEUS.

I—I saw it.

ELKIN.

Saw a will?

THADDEUS.

I—I opened it—I—I read it——

ELKIN.

Read it?

THADDEUS.

I—tore it up—got rid of it.

[*Again there is silence, the* MORTIMORES *and the* PONTINGS *sitting open-mouthed and motionless.*

ELKIN.

[*After a while.*] Mr. Vallance, I think we ought to tell Mr. Mortimore that he appears to be making a confession of the gravest kind——

VALLANCE.

Yes.

ELKIN.

One that puts him in a very serious position.

VALLANCE.

[*To* THADDEUS, *after a further pause.*] Mr. Mortimore——?

[THADDEUS *makes no response.*

ELKIN.

If, understanding that, he chooses to continue, there is nothing to prevent our hearing him.

THADDEUS.

[*Looking straight before him, his arms still upon the table, locking and unlocking his hands as he speaks.*] It—it happened on the Wednesday night—in Cannon Row—in Ned's house—the night before he died—the night we were left without a nurse. [*Another pause.* VALLANCE *takes a sheet of paper and selects a pen.* ELKIN *pushes the inkstand nearer to him.*] Mrs. James—and—and Mrs. Stephen—my —my sisters-in-law——

[ANN *and* LOUISA *get to their feet and advance a step or two.*

ELKIN.

[*Hearing the rustle of their skirts and turning to them.*] Keep your seats, ladies, please.

[*They sit again, drawing their chairs close together.*

THADDEUS.

My sisters-in-law had gone home—that is, to their hotel —to get a few hours' sleep in case of their having to sit up through the night. Jim and Stephen and I were out and about, trying to find a night-nurse who'd take Nurse Ralston's place temporarily. At about nine o'clock, I looked in at Cannon Row, to see how things were getting on.

VALLANCE.

[*Who is writing.*] The Wednesday? Mr. Edward Mortimore dying on Thursday, the twentieth of June——

ELKIN.

On the morning of Thursday, the twentieth.

VALLANCE.

That makes the Wednesday we are speaking of, Wednesday, June the nineteenth.

ELKIN.

[*To* THADDEUS.] You looked in at Cannon Row——?

VALLANCE.

At about nine o'clock on the night of Wednesday, June the nineteenth.

THADDEUS.

I—I went up-stairs and sat by Ned's bed, and by and by he began talking to me about—about Phyllis. He—he'd taken rather a fancy to her, he said, and he wanted to give her a memento—a keepsake.

ELKIN.

Phyllis——?

VALLANCE.

[*To* ELKIN.] His wife. [*To* THADDEUS.] Your wife?

[THADDEUS *nods.*

ELKIN.

[*Recollecting.*] Of course.

THADDEUS.

[*Moistening his lips with his tongue.*] He—he had some little bits of jewelry in his safe, and he—he asked me to go down-stairs and—and to bring them up to him.

ELKIN.

[*Keenly.*] In his safe?

VALLANCE.

The safe in the library?

[THADDEUS *nods again.*

ELKIN.

Quite so.

VALLANCE.

And—er——?

THADDEUS.

He—he gave me his keys, and I—I went down—I——

[*He stops suddenly and* VALLANCE *glances at him. Noticing his extreme pallor,* VALLANCE *looks round the room. Seeing the water-bottle upon the sideboard,* VALLANCE *rises and fills the tumbler. Returning to the table, he places the glass before* THADDEUS *and resumes his seat.*

THADDEUS.

[*After a gulp of water.*] It was—it was in the drawer of the safe—the drawer——

ELKIN.

What was?

THADDEUS.

[*Wiping his mouth with his handkerchief.*] A large envelope—a large envelope—the envelope containing the will.

VALLANCE.

How did you know——?

THADDEUS.

"My Will" was written on it.

VALLANCE.

[*Writing.*] "My Will"——

ELKIN.

On the envelope? [THADDEUS *nods.*] You say you opened it?

[THADDEUS *nods.*

VALLANCE.

Opened the envelope——

ELKIN.

And inside—you found——?

VALLANCE.

What did you find?

THADDEUS.

Ned's will.

VALLANCE.

[*Writing.*] What appeared to be your brother Edward's will.

ELKIN.

You read it? [THADDEUS *nods.*] You recollect who was interested under it? [THADDEUS *nods.*] Will you tell us——?

[*The* MORTIMORES *and the* PONTINGS *crane their necks forward, listening breathlessly.*

THADDEUS.

He left everything—[*taking another gulp of water*] everything—to Miss Thornhill.

[*There is a slight, undecided movement on the part of the* MORTIMORES *and the* PONTINGS.

ELKIN.

[*Calmly but firmly.*] Keep your seats; keep your seats, *please*. [*To* THADDEUS.] Can you recall the general form of the will?

THADDEUS.

[*Straining his memory.*] Everything he had—died possessed of—to Helen Thornhill—spinster—of some address in Paris—absolutely. And—and he appointed her his sole executrix.

ELKIN.

Do you recollect the date?

THADDEUS.

Date——?

ELKIN.

Did you observe the date of the will?

THADDEUS.

[*Quickly.*] Oh, yes; it was made three years ago.

ELKIN.

[*To* VALLANCE.] When she came of age.

THADDEUS.

Oh, and he asked her to remember his servants—old servants at the brewery and in Cannon Row. [*Leaning back, exhausted.*] There was nothing else. It was very short—written by Ned——

ELKIN.

The whole of it? [THADDEUS *nods, with half-closed eyes.*] The whole of it was in his handwriting? [THADDEUS *nods again.*] Ah! [*To* VALLANCE, *with a note of triumph in his voice.*] A holograph will, Mr. Vallance, prepared by the man himself.

VALLANCE.

[*Now taking up the questioning of* THADDEUS.] Tell me, Mr. Mortimore—have you any exact recollection as to whether this document, which you describe as a will, was duly signed and witnessed?

THADDEUS.

[*Rousing himself.*] It was—it was—signed by Ned.

VALLANCE.

Was it signed, not only by your brother, but by two witnesses under an attestation clause stating that the testator signed in the joint presence of those witnesses and that each of them signed in his presence?

THADDEUS.

I—I don't recollect that.

VALLANCE.

[*Writing.*] You've no recollection of that.

[JAMES, STEPHEN, *and* PONTING *stir themselves.*

JAMES.

[*Hoarsely.*] He doesn't recollect that, Mr. Vallance.

STEPHEN.

[*In quavering tones.*] No, he—he doesn't recollect that.

PONTING.

[*Pulling at his moustache with trembling fingers.*] That's most important, Mr. Vallance, isn't it—isn't it?

VALLANCE.

[*To* THADDEUS, *not heeding the interruption.*] You say you destroyed this document——

ELKIN.

Tore it up.

VALLANCE.

When—and where? In the room—in the library?

THADDEUS.

[*Thinking.*] N-no—out of doors.

VALLANCE.

Out of doors. When?

THADDEUS.

[*At a loss.*] When——?

VALLANCE.

When. [*Looking at him in surprise.*] You can't remember——?

THADDEUS.

[*Recollecting.*] Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes. Some time between ten and eleven on the Thursday morning, after I left Phyllis—after I left my wife at Roper's to be measured for her black.

VALLANCE.

[*Writing.*] What did you do then?

THADDEUS.

[*Readily.*] I went to Ford Street bridge, and tore up the paper, and dropped the pieces into the Linch.

VALLANCE.

[*Writing.*] Into the river——

ELKIN.

One more question, Mr. Mortimore—to make your motive perfectly clear to us. May we assume that, on the night of June the nineteenth, you were sufficiently acquainted with the law of intestacy to know that, if this dying man left no will, you would be likely to benefit considerably?

THADDEUS.

Well, I—I had—the idea——

ELKIN.

The idea?

THADDEUS.

I—I—— [*Recollecting.*] Oh, yes; there'd been a discussion in the train, you see, on the Tuesday, going to Linchpool——

ELKIN.

Discussion?

THADDEUS.

Among us all, as to how a man's money is disposed of, if he dies intestate.

ELKIN.

[*Nodding.*] Precisely. [*To* JAMES *and* STEPHEN.] You remember that conversation taking place, gentlemen?

JAMES.

Oh, I—I dessay.

ELKIN.

[*To* THADDEUS.] So that, when you came upon the envelope with the endorsement upon it—"My Will"——?

THADDEUS.

[*Leaning his head upon his hands.*] Yes—yes——

VALLANCE.

[*Running his eyes over his notes, to* THADDEUS.] Have you anything to add, Mr. Mortimore?

THADDEUS.

[*In a muffled voice.*] No. [*Quickly.*] Oh, there is one thing I should like to add. [*Brokenly.*] With regard to Miss Thornhill—I—I hope you'll bear in mind that I—that none of us—heard from Mr. Elkin of the existence of a child—a daughter—till the Thursday—middleday——

ELKIN.

That is so.

THADDEUS.

It doesn't make it much better; only—a girl—alone in the world—one wouldn't—[*breaking off*] no, I've nothing more to say.

ELKIN.

[*To* THADDEUS.] And we may take it that your present act, Mr. Mortimore, is an act of conscience, purely?

[THADDEUS *inclines his head. There is silence again, the* MORTIMORES *and the* PONTINGS *presenting a picture of utter wretchedness. The ladies' tears begin to flow.*

JAMES.

[*After a time, speaking with some difficulty.*] Well——

STEPHEN.

[*Piteously.*] Mr. Vallance——?

JAMES.

What—what's to be done, Mr. Vallance?

PONTING.

[*To the ladies.*] For God's sake, be quiet!

JAMES.

[*A clenched fist on the table.*] What we want to know is—what we want to know is—who does my brother Edward's money belong to now—*her* or us?

STEPHEN.

[*In agony.*] Her!

PONTING.

Don't be a damn fool, Mortimore!

VALLANCE.

Well, gentlemen, I confess I am hardly prepared to express an opinion off-hand on the legal aspect of the case——

PONTING.

The will's torn up—it's destroyed——!

STEPHEN.

It's destroyed—gone—gone!

PONTING.

Gone.

VALLANCE.

But I need not remind you, there is another aspect——

PONTING.

I don't care a rap for any other aspect——

STEPHEN.

We want the *law* explained to us—the law——

PONTING.

The law——!

JAMES.

[*To* ELKIN.] Mr. Elkin——?

ELKIN.

You appeal to me, gentlemen?

STEPHEN *and* PONTING.

Yes—yes——

ELKIN.

Then I feel bound to tell you that *I* shall advise Miss Thornhill, as the executrix named in the will, to apply to the Court for probate of its substance and effect——

VALLANCE.

[*To* ELKIN.] Ask the Court to presume the will to have been made in due form——?

ELKIN.

Decidedly.

[STEPHEN *and* PONTING *fall back in their seats in a stupor, and once more there is silence, broken only by the sound of the women sniveling.* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE *slowly proceed to collect their papers.*

JAMES.

[*Turning upon* THADDEUS, *brutally.*] Have you—have you told Phyllis—have you told your wife what you've been up to?

[*At the mention of* PHYLLIS, *there is a movement of indignation on the part of the ladies.*

ROSE.

Ha!

JAMES.

[*To* THADDEUS.] Have yer?

THADDEUS.

Y-yes—just before I came out. [*Weakly.*] That—that's what made me so late.

JAMES.

[*Between his teeth.*] What does *she* think of yer?

THADDEUS.

Oh, she—she's dreadfully—cut up—of course.

ROSE.

[*Hysterically.*] The jewelry! Ha, ha, ha! [*Rising.*] She's managed to get hold of some of the jewelry, at any rate.

ANN.

[*With a sob.*] Yes, she—she managed *that.*

LOUISA.

[*Mopping her face.*] She's kept that from us artfully enough.

ROSE.

[*Going over to* ANN *and* LOUISA, *who rise to receive her.*] Ha, ha! Edward's "little bits" of jewelry!

ANN.

Little bits!

ROSE.

They're little bits that are *left*.

LOUISA.

How many did she have of them, I wonder!

ROSE.

She shall be made to restore them——

LOUISA.

Every one of them.

THADDEUS.

No, no, no—— [*Stretching out a hand towards the ladies.*] Rosie—Ann—Lou—Phyllis hadn't any of the jewelry—not a scrap. I put it all back into the safe. I—I swear she hadn't any of it.

ELKIN.

Why did you do that?

THADDEUS.

[*Agitatedly.*] Why, you see, Mr. Elkin, when I carried it up-stairs, I found my brother Edward in a state of collapse—a sort of faint——

ELKIN.

[*With a nod.*] Ah——

THADDEUS.

And Phyllis—my wife—she sent me off at once for the doctor. It was on the Wednesday evening, you know——

VALLANCE.

[*Pricking up his ears.*] Your wife, Mr. Mortimore——?

THADDEUS.

It was on the Wednesday evening that the change set in.

VALLANCE.

[*To* THADDEUS.] Your wife sent you off at once——?

THADDEUS.

[*To* VALLANCE.] To fetch the doctor.

VALLANCE.

[*Raising his eyebrows.*] Oh, Mrs. Mortimore was in the house while all this was going on?

THADDEUS.

Y-yes; she was left in charge of him—in charge of Ned——

ELKIN.

[*To* VALLANCE, *in explanation.*] To allow these other ladies to rest, preparatory to their taking charge later.

THADDEUS.

Yes.

VALLANCE.

I hadn't gathered——

JAMES.

[*Who had been sitting glaring into space, thoughtfully.*] Hold hard. [*To* THADDEUS.] *You* didn't go for the doctor.

THADDEUS.

Yes, I—I went——

STEPHEN.

[*Awakening from his trance.*] Phyllis sent the cook for the doctor.

THADDEUS.

Yes, yes; you're quite right. The cook was the first to go——

ELKIN.

[*To* THADDEUS.] You followed?

THADDEUS.

I followed.

JAMES.

[*Knitting his brows.*] It must have been a good time afterwards.

THADDEUS.

Y-yes, perhaps it was.

JAMES.

I was at Dr. Oswald's when the woman arrived. The doctor was out, and——

VALLANCE.

[*To* THADDEUS.] You said your wife sent you at once.

THADDEUS.

Told me to go at once. There—there was the jewelry to put back into the safe——

VALLANCE.

[*Eyeing* THADDEUS.] What time was it when you *got* to the doctor's?

THADDEUS.

Oh—ten, I should say—or a quarter-past.

JAMES.

[*Shaking his head.*] No. I sat there, waiting for Dr. Oswald to come in——

STEPHEN.

[*To* THADDEUS.] Besides, that couldn't have been; you were with me then.

JAMES.

[*To* STEPHEN.] Was he?

STEPHEN.

Why, yes; he and I were at the Nurses' Home in Wharton Street from half-past nine till ten.

JAMES.

Half-past nine——?

STEPHEN.

[*Becoming more confident as he proceeds.*] And we never left each other till we went back to Cannon Row.

VALLANCE.

Let us understand this——

PONTING.

[*Who has gradually revived, eagerly.*] Yes—yes—[*to the ladies.*] Sssh!

STEPHEN.

And, what's more, we allowed ourselves a quarter of an hour to walk to Wharton Street.

JAMES.

[*Quietly, looking round.*] Hallo——!

THADDEUS.

It—it's evident that I—that I'm mistaken in thinking that I—that I went to Dr. Oswald's——

VALLANCE.

Mistaken?

THADDEUS.

I—I suppose that, as the woman had already gone, I—I considered it—wasn't necessary—— [*To* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE, *passing his hand before his eyes.*] You must excuse my stupidity, gentlemen.

VALLANCE.

[*To* THADDEUS, *distrustfully.*] Then, according to your brother Stephen, Mr. Mortimore, you were in Cannon Row, on the occasion of this particular visit, no longer than from nine o'clock till a quarter-past?

STEPHEN.

Not so long, because we met, by arrangement, at a quarter-past nine, in the hall of the Grand Hotel——

JAMES.

The hotel's six or seven minutes' walk from Cannon Row——

PONTING.

Quite, quite.

THADDEUS.

[*A little wildly.*] I said I called in at Cannon Row at *about* nine o'clock. It may have been half-past eight; it may have been eight——

JAMES.

Ann and Lou didn't leave Cannon Row till past eight——

LOUISA.

[*Standing, with* ANN *and* ROSE, *by the tea-table.*] It had gone eight——

JAMES.

I walked 'em round to the Grand——

STEPHEN.

The *three* of us walked with them to the Grand——!

LOUISA.

All three——

JAMES.

So we did.

STEPHEN.

[*Excitedly.*] And then Thaddeus went off to the Clarence Hospital with a note from Dr. Oswald——

JAMES.

By George, yes!

STEPHEN.

I left him opposite the Exchange—it must have been nearly half-past eight *then*——!

[JAMES *rises. The ladies draw nearer to the dining-table.*

THADDEUS.

Ah, but I didn't go to the hospital—I didn't go to the hospital——

STEPHEN.

[*Rising.*] Yes, you did. You brought a note *back* from the hospital, for us to take to Wharton Street——

VALLANCE.

[*To* ELKIN.] How far is the Clarence Hospital from the Exchange?

ELKIN.

A ten minutes' drive. It's on the other side of the water.

THADDEUS.

I—I—I'd forgotten the hospital——

JAMES.

[*Scowling at* THADDEUS.] Forgotten——?

THADDEUS.

I—I—I mean I—I thought the hospital came later—after I'd been to Wharton Street——

JAMES.

[*Going to* VALLANCE *and tapping him on the shoulder.*] Mr. Vallance——

THADDEUS.

I—I must have gone to Cannon Row *between* my return from the hospital and my meeting Stephen at the Grand——

JAMES.

[*To* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE.] Why, he couldn't have *done* it, gentlemen——

PONTING.

Impossible!

STEPHEN.

It's obvious; he *couldn't* have done it.

THADDEUS.

I—I was only a few minutes at the hospital——

ELKIN.

[*Scribbling on the back of a document.*] Oh, yes, he could have done it—barely——

VALLANCE.

[*Making a mental calculation.*] Assuming that he left his brother at the Exchange at eight-twenty——

ELKIN.

Ten minutes *to* the hospital.

VALLANCE.

If he drove there——

THADDEUS.

I did drive—I did drive——

PONTING.

[*Who is also figuring it out on paper.*] Ten minutes back——

ELKIN.

Ten minutes *at* the hospital——

PONTING.

Eight-fifty——

THADDEUS.

Eight-fifty in Cannon Row! That was it—that was it, Mr. Elkin——

JAMES.

Give him twenty minutes in Cannon Row—*give* it him! He couldn't have done all he says he did in the time, gentlemen——

STEPHEN.

He couldn't have *done* it——

PONTING.

Impossible!

ELKIN.

[*To* PONTING.] No, no, please—not impossible.

VALLANCE.

[*To* STEPHEN.] When you met Mr. Thaddeus Mortimore—you—when you met him in the hall of the Grand Hotel, before starting for Wharton Street, did he say anything to you as to his having just called at the house——?

STEPHEN.

No.

VALLANCE.

Nothing as to an alarming change in your brother's condition?

STEPHEN.

Not a syllable.

JAMES.

[*To* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE.] Oh, there's a screw loose here, gentlemen, surely?

STEPHEN.

[*Joining* JAMES.] That is *most* extraordinary, Mr. Vallance—isn't it? Not a syllable!

[ANN *and* LOUISA *join their husbands and the four gather round* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE. ROSE *stands behind* PONTING'S *chair.*

THADDEUS.

You see—Edward—Edward had rallied before I left Cannon Row. He—he'd fallen into a nice, quiet sleep——

JAMES.

All in twenty minutes, gentlemen—twenty minutes at the outside!

VALLANCE.

[*To* THADDEUS.] Mr. Mortimore——

ANN.

I remember——

PONTING.

[*To* ANN.] Hold your tongue!

VALLANCE.

Mr. Mortimore, *who let you into the house* in Cannon Row on the night of June the nineteenth——?

PONTING.

Ah, yes——

VALLANCE.

At *any* time between the hours of eight o'clock——?

STEPHEN.

And eleven.

ELKIN.

[*To* THADDEUS.] Who gave you admittance—which of the servants?

THADDEUS.

I—I can't—I don't—[*blankly, addressing* VALLANCE] was it the—the butler——?

VALLANCE.

No, no; I ask *you*. [*To* ELKIN, *who nods in reply.*] Have you the servants' addresses?

THADDEUS.

But you wouldn't—you wouldn't trust to the servants' memories as to—as to which of them opened the front door to me a month ago! [*With an attempt at a laugh.*] It's ridiculous!

ELKIN.

[*Reprovingly.*] Ah, now, now, Mr. Mortimore!

THADDEUS.

[*Starting up from the table.*] Oh, it isn't fair—it isn't fair of you to badger me like this; it isn't fair!

VALLANCE.

Nobody desires to "badger" you——

THADDEUS.

Trip me up, then—confuse me. [*At the left-hand end of the table, clutching the back of a chair.*] The will—the will's the main point—Ned's will. What does it matter—what can it matter, to a quarter of an hour or so—when I was in Cannon Row, or how long I was there? One

would think, by the way I'm being treated, gentlemen, that I'd something to gain by this, instead of everything to lose —everything to lose!

JAMES.

[*Coming forward, on the further side of the table.*] Don't you whine about what *you've* got to lose——!

STEPHEN.

[*Joining him.*] What about *us!*

THE LADIES.

Us!

PONTING.

[*Hitting the table.*] Yes, confound you!

VALLANCE.

Colonel Ponting——!

ELKIN.

[*To* JAMES *and* STEPHEN.] It seems to me—if my friend Mr. Vallance will allow me to say so—that you are really bearing a little hardly on your brother Thaddeus.

THADDEUS.

[*Gratefully.*] Thank you, Mr. Elkin.

ELKIN.

What reason—what possible reason can there be for doubting his good faith?

THADDEUS.

Thank you.

ELKIN.

Here is a man who forfeits a considerable sum of money, and deliberately places himself in peril, in order to right a wrong which nobody on earth would have suspected him of

committing. Mr. Mortimore is *accusing* himself of a serious offense, not defending himself from it.

VALLANCE.

[*Obstinately.*] What we beg of Mr. Mortimore to do, for the sake of all parties, is to clear up certain inconsistencies in his story with his brothers' account of his movements and conduct on this Wednesday evening. We are entitled to ask that.

JAMES.

Aye—entitled.

STEPHEN *and* PONTING.

Entitled.

ELKIN.

[*To* JAMES *and* STEPHEN.] Yes, and Mr. Mortimore is equally entitled to refuse it.

JAMES, STEPHEN *and* PONTING.

[*Indignantly.*] Oh——!

THADDEUS.

But I—I haven't refused. I—I've done my best——

ELKIN.

On the other hand, if he has no objection to her doing so, the person to assist you, I suggest—distressing as it may be to her—is the wife.

VALLANCE.

[*Assentingly.*] The wife——

[THADDEUS *pushes aside the chair which he is holding and comes to the table.*

ELKIN.

She ought to be able to satisfy you as to what time he was with her——

VALLANCE.

[*To everybody.*] By-the-bye, has she ever mentioned this visit of her husband's to Cannon Row——?

ANN *and* LOUISA.

Never—never——

ELKIN.

Attaching no importance to it. But now——

THADDEUS.

[*Stretching out a quivering hand to them all.*] No. No, no. Don't you—don't you drag my wife into this. I—I won't have my wife dragged into this——

JAMES.

[*In a blaze.*] Why not?

STEPHEN.

Why not?

THE LADIES.

[*Indignantly.*] Ah——!

THADDEUS.

You—you leave my wife out of it——

JAMES.

[*To* THADDEUS, *furiously.*] Who the hell's your wife——!

ELKIN *and* VALLANCE.

Gentlemen—gentlemen——

LOUISA.

Who's Phyllis——!

ANN.

Who's *she*——!

ROSE.

Ha!

JAMES *and* STEPHEN.

[*Derisively.*] Ha, ha, ha!

THADDEUS.

Anyhow, I do object—I do object to your dragging her into it—[*his show of courage flickering away*] I—I do object—[*coming to the nearer side of the table, rather unsteadily*] Mr. Elkin—Mr. Vallance—I—I don't think I can be of any further assistance to you to-day——

[VALLANCE *shrugs his shoulders at* ELKIN.

ELKIN.

[*To* THADDEUS, *kindly.*] One minute—one minute more. Mr. Vallance has taken down your statement roughly. [*To* VALLANCE.] If you'll read us your notes, Mr. Vallance, Mr. Mortimore will tell us whether they are substantially correct—[*to* THADDEUS] perhaps he will even be willing to attach his name to them——

[*With a nod of patient acquiescence,* THADDEUS *sinks into the middle chair.* VALLANCE *prepares to read his notes, first making some additions to them.*

JAMES.

[*To* THADDEUS, *from the other side of the table.*] Look here——!

THADDEUS.

[*Feebly.*] No—no more questions. I—I'm advised I—I may refuse——

JAMES.

Mr. Vallance asked you just now about your conscience——

THADDEUS.

I—I'm not going to answer any more questions——

STEPHEN.

[*To* JAMES.] It was Mr. Elkin——

JAMES.

I don't care a curse which it was——

THADDEUS.

No more questions——

JAMES.

[*Leaning across the table towards* THADDEUS, *fiercely.*] When the devil did your conscience begin to prick you over this? Hey?

STEPHEN.

[*To* THADDEUS.] Yes, you've been in excellent spirits apparently this last month—excellent spirits.

JAMES.

[*Hammering on the table.*] Hey?

STEPHEN.

[*To* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE.] There was no sign of anything amiss when we were with him this afternoon, gentlemen—none whatever, I give you my word.

JAMES.

Less than two hours ago—not a symptom!

STEPHEN.

[*To* JAMES.] He was gay enough at the club dinner on Tuesday night. It was remarked—commented on.

LOUISA.

[*At* STEPHEN'S *elbow, unconsciously.*] It's Phyllis who's been ill all the month, not Thaddeus.

JAMES.

[*In the same way, with a hoarse laugh.*] Ha! If it had been his precio wife who'd come to us and told us this tale——

STEPHEN.

Yes, if it had been the lady——

JAMES.

If it had been—— [*Struck by the idea which occurs to him,* JAMES *breaks off.* THADDEUS *doesn't stir.* JAMES, *after a pause, thoughtfully.*] If it had been——

STEPHEN.

[*Holding his breath, to* JAMES.] Eh?

JAMES.

[*Slowly stroking his beard.*] One might have—understood it——

ELKIN.

[*Who has been listening attentively, in a tone of polite interest.*] How long has Mrs. Mortimore been indisposed?

JAMES.

[*Disturbed.*] Oh—er—a few weeks——

VALLANCE.

[*Quietly.*] Ever since——?

JAMES.

[*With a nod.*] Aye.

[ELKIN *and* VALLANCE *look at each other inquiringly.*

STEPHEN.

[*Staring into space.*] Ever since—Edward—as a matter of fact——

ROSE.

[*Going to* ANN *and* LOUISA.] What's wrong with her? What's wrong with his wife?

ANN.

[*Obtusely.*] She's not sleeping.

LOUISA.

[*Looking from one to the other.*] No—she isn't——

[*There is a further pause, and then* THADDEUS, *slowly turning from the table, rises.*

THADDEUS.

[*In a strange voice, his hands fumbling at the buttons of his jacket.*] Well, gentlemen—whatever my sins are—I—I decline to sit still and hear my wife insulted in this style. If it's all the same to you, I'll call round on Mr. Vallance in the morning and—and sign the paper——

[*While* THADDEUS *is speaking,* JAMES *and* STEPHEN *come forward on the left,* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE *on the right. The three women get together at the back and look on with wide-open eyes. The movement is made gradually and noiselessly, so that when* THADDEUS *turns to go he is startled at finding his way obstructed. After a time* PONTING *also leaves the table, watching the proceedings, with a falling jaw, from a little distance on the right.*

ELKIN.

[*Rubbing his chin meditatively, to* THADDEUS.] Mr. Mortimore, your wife traveled with you and the other members of the family to Linchpool on the Tuesday——?

JAMES.

Aye, she was with us——

ELKIN.

[*To* THADDEUS.] She was in the railway carriage when the—when the discussion arose——?

STEPHEN.

Yes, yes——

ELKIN.

The discussion as to where a man's money goes, in the absence of a will?

ANN.

[*From the other side of the table.*] Yes——

LOUISA.

[*Close to* ANN.] Of course she was.

ELKIN.

[*Nodding.*] H'm. [*To* THADDEUS.] I—I am most anxious not to pain you unnecessarily. Er—the conversation you had with your brother Edward at the bedside, in reference to Mrs. Thaddeus Mortimore—when he said that he—that he——

JAMES.

[*Breathing heavily.*] He'd taken a fancy to her——

ELKIN.

That he wished to make her a present of jewelry—she was within hearing during that talk?

THADDEUS.

[*Avoiding everybody's gaze, his hands twitching involuntarily at his side.*] She—she may have been.

ELKIN.

[*Piercingly.*] He was left in her charge, you know.

THADDEUS.

She—she was moving about the room——

ELKIN.

She would scarcely have been far away from him.

THADDEUS.

[*Moistening his lips with his tongue.*] N-no.

ELKIN.

And when he handed you his keys and asked you to go down-stairs and open the safe—did she hear and witness that also?

THADDEUS.

She—she—very likely.

ELKIN.

[*Raising his voice.*] There was nothing at all confidential in this transaction between you and your brother?

THADDEUS.

Why—why should there have been?

ELKIN.

Why *should* there have been? [*Coming a step nearer to him.*] So that, feeling towards her as he did, there was no reason why, if you hadn't chanced to be on the spot—there was no reason why he shouldn't have held that conversation with *her,* and intrusted *her* with the keys.

THADDEUS.

She—she was almost a stranger to him. He—he hadn't seen her since she was a child——

ELKIN.

[*Interrupting him.*] Tell us—this illness of Mrs. Mortimore's——?

THADDEUS.

My—my wife's a nervous, delicate woman—always has been——

ELKIN.

[*Nodding.*] Quite so.

THADDEUS.

She—she was upset at being alone with Edward when he —when he swooned——

JAMES.

That was the tale——

ELKIN.

[*To* THADDEUS.] Although you happened to be in the library, a floor or two below, at the time?

THADDEUS.

He—he might have died suddenly, in her arms. She's a nervous, sensitive woman——

ELKIN.

[*Nodding.*] And she's been unwell ever since. [*With an abrupt change of manner.*] Mr. Mortimore, how is the lock of the safe opened?

THADDEUS.

Opened——?

ELKIN.

[*Sharply.*] The safe in the library in Cannon Row—how do you open it? [THADDEUS *is silent.*] Is it a simple lock, or is there anything unusual about it?

THADDEUS.

He—he gave me directions how to open it.

ELKIN.

Tell us——

THADDEUS.

I—I forget——

ELKIN.

Forget?

THADDEUS.

It—it's gone from me——

JAMES.

[*In a low voice.*] Gentlemen, you couldn't forget *that*——

STEPHEN.

[*In the same way.*] You *couldn't* forget it.

ELKIN.

[*To* THADDEUS, *solemnly.*] Mr. Mortimore, are you sure that the conversation at the bedside didn't take place between your brother and your wife solely, and that it wasn't *she* who was sent down-stairs to fetch the jewelry?

THADDEUS.

[*Drawing himself up, with a last effort.*] Sure——!

ELKIN.

Are you positive that *she* didn't open the safe?

THADDEUS.

It—it's ridiculous——

ELKIN.

[*Quickly.*] When you took her to Roper's, the draper's, on the Thursday—you left her there?

THADDEUS.

Yes, I—I left her——

ELKIN.

Are you sure that *she* didn't then go on to the bridge, and tear up the will, and throw the pieces into the river?

THADDEUS.

I—I decline to answer any more questions——

ELKIN.

[*Raising his voice again.*] Were you in Cannon Row, sir, on the night of June the nineteenth, for a *single moment* between eight o'clock and eleven——?

THADDEUS.

[*Losing his head completely.*] Ah! Ah! I know—I know! You mean to drag my wife into this——!

ELKIN.

[*To* THADDEUS.] You were late in coming here this afternoon, Mr. Mortimore——

THADDEUS.

[*To* ELKIN, *threateningly.*] Don't you—don't you dare to do it——!

ELKIN.

Owing, you say, to your having made a communication to Mrs. Mortimore about this affair——

THADDEUS.

[*Clinging to the chair which is behind him.*] You—you leave my wife out of it——!

ELKIN.

Are you sure that you were not delayed through having to *receive* a communication from her——?

THADDEUS.

[*Dropping into the chair.*] Don't you—drag her—into it——!

ELKIN.

Are you sure that the story you have told us, substituting yourself for the principal person of that story, is not exactly the story which she has just told *you?* [*There is a pause.* PONTING *goes to* ROSE.] Mr. Vallance——

VALLANCE.

Yes?

ELKIN.

I propose to see Mrs. Mortimore in this matter, without delay.

VALLANCE.

Very good.

ELKIN.

Will you——?

VALLANCE.

Certainly.

[*Quietly,* VALLANCE *returns to the table and, seating himself, again collects his papers.* ELKIN *is following him.*

JAMES.

Mr. Elkin——

ELKIN.

[*Stopping.*] Eh?

JAMES.

Stealing a will—destroying a will—what is it?

ELKIN.

What *is* it?

JAMES.

The law—what's the law——?

ELKIN.

[*To* JAMES.] I—I'm sorry to have to say, sir—it's a felony.

THADDEUS.

[*With a look of horror.*] Oh——!

[ANN *and* LOUISA *come to* JAMES *and* STEPHEN *hurriedly.* ELKIN *sits beside* VALLANCE, *and, picking up their bags from the floor, they put away their papers.*

JAMES.

[*Standing over* THADDEUS.] Well! Are yer proud of her now?

STEPHEN.

This is what his marriage has ended in!

LOUISA.

I'm not in the least surprised.

ANN.

Old Burdock's daughter!

ROSE.

[*From the other side of the table.*] Thank heaven, my name isn't Mortimore!

THADDEUS.

[*Leaping to his feet in a frenzy.*] Don't you touch her! Don't any of you touch her! Don't you harm a hair of her head! [*To the group on the left.*] You've helped to bring this on her! You've helped to make her life unendurable!

You've helped to bring her to this! She's been a good wife to me. Oh, my God, let me get her away! [*Turning towards the door.*] Mr. Elkin—Mr. Vallance—do let me get her away! Don't you harm a hair of her head! Don't you touch her! [*At the door.*] She's been a good wife to me! [*Opening the door and disappearing.*] She's been a good wife to me——!

JAMES.

[*Moving over to the right, shouting after* THADDEUS.] Been a good wife to you, has she!

STEPHEN.

[*Also moving to the right.*] A disgrace—a disgrace to the family.

LOUISA.

[*Following* STEPHEN.] I always said so—I said so till I was tired——

JAMES.

We've helped to bring her to this!

ANN.

[*Sitting in a chair on the nearer side of the dining-table.*] A vile creature!

PONTING.

[*Coming forward on the left with* ROSE.] Damn the woman! Damn the woman! My position is a cruel one——

STEPHEN.

[*Raising his arms as he paces the room on the right.*] Here's a triumph for Hammond!

JAMES.

[*To* PONTING, *contemptuously.*] Your position——!

LOUISA.

Nellie Robson's got the better of me now.

PONTING.

[*To* JAMES.] I'm landed with an enormous house in Carlos Place—my builders are in it——

ROSE.

[*Pacing the room on the left.*] Oh, we're in a shocking scrape! We're up to our necks——!

JAMES.

[*Approaching* PONTING.] D'ye think you're the only sufferer——!

STEPHEN.

[*Wildly.*] A triumph for Hammond! A triumph for Hammond!

JAMES.

[*To* PONTING.] I've bought all that dirt at the bottom of Gordon Street—acres of it——!

PONTING.

[*Passing him and walking away to the right.*] That's *your* business.

STEPHEN.

[*Now, with* LOUISA, *at the further side of the dining-table.*] Hammond and his filthy rag!

JAMES.

[*Going after* PONTING, *in a fury.*] Aye, it *is* my business——

PONTING.

[*Turning upon him viciously.*] I wish to God, sir, I'd never seen or heard of you, *or* your family.

ROSE.

[*Coming forward.*] Oh, Toby, don't——!

JAMES.

[*To* PONTING.] You wish that, do yer——!

ANN.

[*Rising and putting herself between* JAMES *and* PONTING.] James——!

STEPHEN.

[*Shaking his fists in the air.*] Blast Hammond and his filthy rag.

JAMES.

[*To* PONTING.] You patronizing little pauper——!

ROSE.

[*To* JAMES.] Don't you speak to my husband like that——!

PONTING.

You're a pack of low, common people——!

ROSE.

[*Going to* PONTING.] He's the only gentleman among you.

JAMES.

The only gentleman among us——!

STEPHEN.

[*Coming forward, with* LOUISA, *on the left.*] The only gentleman——!

JAMES.

We could have done without such a gentleman in our family—[*to* ANN, *who is forcing him, coaxingly, towards the left*] hey, mother?

STEPHEN.

[*Advancing to* PONTING, *still followed by* LOUISA.] Exceedingly well—exceedingly well——

LOUISA.

[*Taking* STEPHEN'S *arm.*] Don't lower yourself——!

JAMES.

[*Over* ANN'S *shoulder.*] The Colonel never came near us the other day till he saw a chance o' picking up the pieces——!

STEPHEN.

Nor Rose either—neither of them did!

JAMES.

It's six o' one and half a dozen o' the other!

ROSE.

[*To* JAMES *and* STEPHEN.] Oh, you cads, you boys——!

JAMES.

[*Mockingly.*] Didn't they bustle down to Linchpool in a hurry *then!* Ha, ha, ha!

STEPHEN.

[*Waving his hand in* PONTING'S *face.*] This serves you right, Colonel; this serves you right.

ROSE.

[*Leading* PONTING *towards the door.*] Don't notice them —don't notice them——

JAMES.

[*Walking about on the left, to* ANN.] I'm in a mess, mother; I'm in a dreadful mess!

STEPHEN.

[*Sinking into a chair by the tea-table.*] On I go at the broken-down rat-hole in King Street; on I go with my worn-out old plant——!

[*On getting to the door,* PONTING *discovers that* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE *have taken their departure. He returns, with* ROSE, *to the further side of the dining-table.*

ANN.

[*To* JAMES.] You must get rid of your contract, James.

JAMES.

Who'll take it—who'll take it——!

STEPHEN.

I've always been behind the times——

LOUISA.

Nelly will laugh her teeth out of her head——

PONTING.

[*To* JAMES *and* STEPHEN, *trying to attract their attention.*] Mortimore—Mortimore——

ANN.

[*To* JAMES.] It's splendid land, isn't it?

JAMES.

Nobody's been ass enough to touch it but me!

STEPHEN.

[*Rocking himself to and fro.*] Always behind the times —no need to tell me that——

PONTING.

[*To* JAMES.] Mortimore——

JAMES.

[*To* PONTING.] What?

PONTING.

[*Pointing to the empty chairs.*] They've gone——

JAMES.

[*Sobering down.*] Hooked it——

STEPHEN.

[*Looking round.*] Gone——?

JAMES.

Elkin——

STEPHEN.

[*Weakly.*] And Vallance——

JAMES.

They might have had the common civility——

PONTING.

[*Coming forward slowly and dejectedly.*] They've gone to that woman——

ROSE.

[*At the further side of the table.*] I hope they send her to jail—the trull—the baggage——!

[ANN *and* LOUISA *join* ROSE.

PONTING.

The whole business will be settled between 'em in ten minutes—the whole business——

JAMES.

[*Coming to* PONTING.] Aye, the whole concern.

STEPHEN.

[*Who has risen, holding his head.*] Oh, it's awful!

PONTING.

[*Laying a hand on* JAMES *and* STEPHEN *who are on either side of him.*] My friends, don't let us disagree—we're all in the same boat——

JAMES.

[*Grimly, looking into space.*] Aye, they'll be talking it over nicely——

PONTING.

Let us stick to each other. Aren't we throwing up the sponge prematurely——?

JAMES.

[*Not heeding him.*] Tad and his wife and the lawyers —ha, ha——!

STEPHEN.

And that girl——

JAMES.

[*Nodding.*] The young lady.

PONTING.

What girl?

STEPHEN.

Miss Thornhill.

PONTING.

Thornhill——?

JAMES.

She's staying with 'em.

PONTING.

She is!

ROSE.

[*Coming forward on the left.*] Staying with the Tads——?

PONTING.

In their house! Elkin and Vallance will find her there!

JAMES.

[*Nodding.*] Aye.

PONTING.

[*Violently.*] It's a conspiracy——?

JAMES.

Conspiracy——?

PONTING.

I see it! The Thornhill girl's in it! She's at the bottom of it! [*Going to* ROSE *as* ANN *and* LOUISA *come forward on the left.*] They're cheating us—they're cheating us. I tell you we ought to be present. They're robbing us behind our backs——

STEPHEN.

[*Looking at* JAMES.] Jim——?

JAMES.

[*Shaking his head.*] No, it's no conspiracy——

PONTING.

It is! They're robbing us——!

STEPHEN.

[*To* JAMES.] Still, I—I really think——

PONTING.

Behind our backs!

THE LADIES.

Yes—yes—yes——

JAMES.

[*After a pause, quietly, stroking his beard.*] By George, we'll go down——!

[*Instantly they all make for the door.*

STEPHEN.

We'll be there as soon as Elkin——

PONTING.

A foul conspiracy——!

ANN.

[*In the rear.*] Wait till I put on my hat——

ROSE.

Jim, you follow with Ann.

PONTING.

[*To* STEPHEN.] We'll go on ahead.

STEPHEN.

Yes, we'll go first.

LOUISA.

I'm ready.

JAMES.

No, no; we'll all go together.

PONTING.

Robbing us behind our backs——!

JAMES.

Look sharp, mother!

THE OTHERS.

Be quick—be quick—be quick——!

[*Seizing* ANN *and pushing her before them, they struggle through the doorway.*

END OF THE THIRD ACT

THE FOURTH ACT

The scene is the same, in every respect, as that of the Second Act.

VALLANCE *is seated at the writing-table by the bay-window, reading aloud from a written paper.* PHYLLIS, *in deep abasement, is upon the settee by the piano, and* THADDEUS *is standing by her, holding her left hand in both of his. On the left of the table at the end of the piano sits* HELEN, *pale, calm, and erect, and opposite to her, in the chair on the other side of the table, is* ELKIN. PONTING *is sitting in the bay-window,* STEPHEN *is standing upon the hearth-rug, and the rest of the "family" are seated about the room—all looking very humble and downcast.* ANN *and* LOUISA *are upon the settee on the right,* ROSE *is in the armchair on the nearer side of the fireplace,* JAMES *on the ottoman.* ROSE, ANN, *and* LOUISA *are in their outdoor things.*

VALLANCE.

[*Reading.*] "It was broad daylight before my husband and I got back to our lodgings. The document was then in a pocket I was wearing under my dress. Before going to bed I hid the pocket in a drawer. At about eleven o'clock on the same morning my husband took me to Roper's, the draper's, in Ford Street, and left me there. After my measurements were taken I went up Ford Street and on to the bridge. I then tore up both the paper and the envelope and dropped the pieces into the water."

ELKIN.

[*Half turning to* PHYLLIS.] You declare that that is correct in every particular, Mrs. Mortimore?

[PHYLLIS *bursts into a paroxysm of tears.*

THADDEUS.

[*To* PHYLLIS, *as if comforting a child.*] All right, dear; all right. I'm with you—I'm with you. [*She sobs helplessly.*] Tell Mr. Elkin—tell him—is that correct?

PHYLLIS.

[*Through her sobs.*] Yes.

ELKIN.

[*To* PHYLLIS.] You've nothing further to say?

[*Her sobbing continues.*

THADDEUS.

[*To* PHYLLIS.] Have you anything more to say, dear? [*Encouragingly, as she tries to speak.*] I'm here, dear—I'm with you. Is there anything—anything more——?

PHYLLIS.

Only—only that I beg Miss Thornhill's pardon. I beg her pardon. Oh, I beg her pardon.

[ELKIN *looks at* HELEN, *who, however, makes no response.*

THADDEUS.

[*To* PHYLLIS, *glancing at the others.*] And—and——

PHYLLIS.

And—and Ann and Jim—and Stephen—and Lou—and Rose and Colonel Ponting—I beg their pardon—I beg their pardon.

[*She sinks back upon the settee, and her fit of weeping gradually exhausts itself.*

THADDEUS.

And I—and I, Mr. Elkin—I wish to offer *my* apologies —my humble apologies—to you and Mr. Vallance—and to everybody—for what took place this afternoon in my brother's dining-room.

ELKIN.

[*Kindly.*] Perhaps it isn't necessary——

THADDEUS.

Perhaps not—but it's on my mind. [*To* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE.] I assure you and Mr. Vallance—[*to the others*] and I assure every member of my family—that when I went away from here I had no intention of inventing the story I attempted to tell you at "Ivanhoe." It came into my head suddenly—quite suddenly—on my way to Claybrook Road —almost at the gate of the house. I must have been mad to think I could succeed in imposing on you all. I believe I *was* mad, gentlemen; and that's my excuse, and I—I hope you'll accept it.

ELKIN.

Speaking for myself, I accept it freely.

VALLANCE

And I.

THADDEUS.

Thank you—thank you.

[*He looks at the others wistfully, but they are all staring at the carpet, and they, too, make no response. Then he seats himself beside* PHYLLIS *and again takes her hand.*

ELKIN.

[*After a pause.*] Well, Mr. Vallance—— [VALLANCE *rises, the written paper in his hand, and comes forward on the left.*] I think—[*glancing over his shoulder at* PHYLLIS]

I think that this lady makes it perfectly clear to any reasonable person that the document which she abstracted from the safe in Cannon Row, and subsequently destroyed, was the late Mr. Edward Mortimore's will, and that Miss Thornhill was the universal legatee under it, and was named as the sole executrix. [VALLANCE *seats himself in the chair on the extreme left.*] As I said in Mr. James Mortimore's house, the advice I shall give to Miss Thornhill is that she applies to the Court for probate of the substance and effect of this will.

VALLANCE.

Upon an affidavit by Mrs. Thaddeus Mortimore——?

ELKIN.

An affidavit disclosing what she has done and verifying a statement of the contents of the will.

VALLANCE.

And how, may I ask, are you going to get over your great difficulty?

ELKIN.

My great difficulty——?

VALLANCE.

The fact that Mrs. Thaddeus Mortimore is unable to swear that the will was duly witnessed.

PONTING.

Ah! [*Rising and coming forward, but discreetly keeping behind* HELEN.] That seems to me to be insuperable—insuperable. [*Anxiously.*] Eh, Mr. Vallance?

STEPHEN.

[*Advancing a step or two.*] An obstacle which cannot be got over.

PONTING.

[*Eyeing* HELEN *furtively.*] It—ah—may appear rather ungracious to Miss Thornhill—a young lady we hold in the highest esteem—and to whom I express regret for any hasty word I may have used on arriving here—unreserved regret —[HELEN'S *eyes flash, and her shoulders contract; otherwise she makes no acknowledgment*] it may appear ungracious to Miss Thornhill to discuss this point in her presence; [*pulling at his moustache*] but she will be the first to recognize that there are many—ah—interests at stake.

STEPHEN.

Many interests—many interests——

PONTING.

And where so many interests are involved, one mustn't—ah—allow oneself to be swayed by anything like sentiment.

STEPHEN.

[*At the round table.*] In justice, one *oughtn't* to be sentimental.

PONTING.

One *daren't* be sentimental.

LOUISA.

[*Meekly, raising her head.*] I always maintain——

STEPHEN.

[*To* LOUISA.] Yes, yes, yes.

LOUISA.

There are two sides——

STEPHEN.

Yes, yes.

ELKIN.

[*Ignoring the interruption.*] Mrs. Thaddeus Mortimore is prepared to swear, Mr. Vallance, that she believes there were other signatures besides the signature of the late Mr. Mortimore.

VALLANCE.

But she has no recollection of the names of witnesses——

PONTING.

None whatever.

STEPHEN.

Not the faintest.

VALLANCE.

Nor as to whether there was an attestation clause at all.

PONTING.

Her memory is an utter blank as to that.

STEPHEN.

An utter blank.

[*As* PONTING *and* STEPHEN *perk up, there is a rise in the spirits of the ladies at the fireplace.* ROSE *twists her chair round to face the men.* JAMES *doesn't stir.*

ELKIN.

Notwithstanding that, I can't help considering it reasonably probable that, in the circumstances, the Court would presume the will to have been made in due form.

PONTING.

[*Walking about agitatedly.*] I differ.

STEPHEN.

[*Walking about.*] So do I.

PONTING.

I don't pretend to a profound knowledge of the law——

STEPHEN.

As a mere layman, *I* consider it extremely *im*probable——extremely *im*probable.

VALLANCE.

[*To* STEPHEN *and* PONTING.] Well, gentlemen, there I am inclined to agree with you——

PONTING.

[*Pulling himself up.*] Ah!

STEPHEN.

[*Returning to the round table.*] Ah!

VALLANCE.

I think it doubtful whether, on the evidence of Mrs. Thaddeus Mortimore, the will could be upheld.

PONTING.

Exactly. [*To everybody.*] You've only to look at the thing in the light of common sense——

STEPHEN.

[*Argumentatively, rapping the table.*] A will exists or it does not exist——

PONTING.

If it ever existed, and has been destroyed——

STEPHEN.

It must be shown that it was a complete will——

PONTING.

Shown beyond dispute.

STEPHEN.

Complete down to the smallest detail.

VALLANCE.

[*Continuing.*] At the same time, in my opinion, the facts do not warrant the making of an affidavit that the late Mr. Mortimore died intestate.

PONTING.

[*Stiffly.*] Indeed?

STEPHEN.

[*Depressed.*] Really?

VALLANCE.

And the question of whether or not he left a duly executed will is clearly one for the Court to decide.

ELKIN.

Quite so—quite so.

VALLANCE.

I advise, therefore, that, to get the question determined, the next-of-kin should consent to the course of procedure suggested by Mr. Elkin.

ELKIN.

I am assuming their consent.

PONTING.

[*Blustering.*] And supposing the next-of-kin do *not* consent, Mr. Vallance——?

STEPHEN.

Supposing we do *not* consent——?

PONTING.

Supposing we are convinced—convinced—that the late Mr. Mortimore died without leaving a properly executed will?

ELKIN.

Then the application, instead of being by motion to the judge in Court, must take the form of an action by writ. [*To* VALLANCE.] In any case, perhaps it should do so.

[*There is a pause.* STEPHEN *wanders disconsolately to the window on the right and stands gazing into the garden.* PONTING *leans his elbows on the piano and stares at vacancy.*

ELKIN.

[*To* HELEN, *looking at his watch.*] Well, my dear Miss Thornhill——?

[VALLANCE *rises.*

HELEN.

Wait—wait a moment——

[*The sound of* HELEN'S *voice turns everybody, except* JAMES, THADDEUS, *and* PHYLLIS, *in her direction.*

ELKIN.

[*To* HELEN.] Eh?

HELEN.

Wait a moment, please. There is something I want to be told—there's something I want to be told plainly.

ELKIN.

What?

HELEN.

Mrs. Thaddeus Mortimore——

ELKIN.

Yes?

HELEN.

[*Slowly.*] I want to know whether it is necessary, whatever proceedings are taken on my behalf—whether it is necessary that she should be publicly disgraced. I want to know that.

ELKIN.

Whichever course is adopted—motion to the judge or action by writ—Mrs. Thaddeus Mortimore's act must be disclosed in open Court.

HELEN.

There are no means of avoiding it?

ELKIN.

None.

HELEN.

And the offence she has committed is—felony, you say?

[ELKIN *inclines his head. Again there is silence, during which* HELEN *sits with knitted brows, and then* JAMES *rouses himself and looks up.*

JAMES.

[*To* ELKIN.] What's the—what's the penalty?

ELKIN.

[*Turning to him.*] The—the penalty?

JAMES.

The legal punishment.

ELKIN.

I think—another occasion——

[*Suddenly* THADDEUS *and* PHYLLIS *rise together, he with an arm round her, supporting her, and they stand side by side like criminals in the dock.*

THADDEUS.

[*Quickly.*] No, no—now——

PHYLLIS.

[*Faintly.*] Yes—now——

THADDEUS.

[*To* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE.] We—we should like to know the worst, gentlemen. I—I had the idea from the first that it was a serious offence—but hardly so serious——

ELKIN.

[*With a wave of the hand.*] By and by——

THADDEUS.

Oh, you needn't hesitate, Mr. Elkin. [*Drawing* PHYLLIS *closer to him.*] We—we shall go through with it. We shall go through with it to the end. [*A pause.*] Imprisonment, sir?

ELKIN.

[*Gravely.*] A person convicted of stealing or destroying a will for a fraudulent purpose is liable under the statute to varying terms of penal servitude, or to imprisonment with or without hard labor. In this instance, we should be justified, I am sure, in hoping for a considerable amount of leniency.

[THADDEUS *and* PHYLLIS *slowly look at one another with expressionless faces.* JAMES *rises and moves away to the fireplace where he stands looking down upon the flowers in the grate.* VALLANCE *goes to the writing-table and puts the written paper into his bag.* ELKIN *rises, takes up his bag from the table at the end of the piano, and is following* VALLANCE. *As he passes* HELEN, *she lays her hand upon his arm.*

HELEN.

Mr. Elkin——

ELKIN.

[*Stopping.*] Yes?

HELEN.

Oh, but this is impossible.

ELKIN.

Impossible?

HELEN.

Quite impossible. I couldn't be a party—please understand me—I refuse to be a party—to any steps which would bring ruin on Mrs. Mortimore.

ELKIN.

[*Politely.*] You refuse——?

HELEN.

Absolutely. At any cost—at any cost to me—we must all unite in sparing her and her husband and children.

ELKIN.

My dear young lady, I join you heartily in your desire not to bring suffering upon innocent people. But if you decline to take proceedings——

HELEN.

There is no "if" in the matter——

ELKIN.

If you decline to take proceedings, there is a deadlock.

HELEN.

A deadlock?

ELKIN.

As Mr. Vallance tells us, it's out of the question that the next-of-kin should now apply for Letters of Administration in the usual way.

HELEN.

Why? I don't see why—I can't see why.

ELKIN.

[*Pointing to* JAMES *and* STEPHEN.] You don't see why neither of these gentlemen can make an affidavit that Mr. Edward Mortimore died intestate!

HELEN.

[*With a movement of the head towards* PHYLLIS.] She has no remembrance of a—what is it called——?

PONTING.

[*Eagerly.*] Attestation clause.

STEPHEN.

[*Coming to the head of the piano.*] Attestation clause.

HELEN.

[*Haughtily, without turning.*] Thank you. [*To* ELKIN.] Only the vaguest notion that there *were* witnesses.

PONTING.

The vaguest notion.

STEPHEN.

The haziest.

ELKIN.

Her memory is uncertain there. [*To* HELEN.] But you know—*you know,* Miss Thornhill—as we all know—that it was your father's will that was found in the safe at Cannon Row and destroyed.

HELEN.

[*Looking up at him, gripping the arms of her chair.*] Yes, of course I know it. Thank God I know it! I'm happy in knowing it. I know he didn't forget me; I know I was all to him that I imagined myself to be. And it's because I've come to know this at last—through *her*—that I can afford to be a little generous to her. Oh, please don't think that I want to introduce sentimentality into this affair—[*with a contemptuous glance at* PONTING *and* STEPHEN] any more than Colonel Ponting does—or Mr. Stephen Mortimore. Mrs. Thaddeus did a cruel thing when she destroyed that will. It's no excuse for her to say that she wasn't aware of my existence. She was defrauding *some* woman; and, as it happened—I own it now!—defrauding that woman, not only of money, but of what is more valuable than money—of peace of mind, contentment, belief in one who could never speak, never explain, never defend himself. However, she has made the best reparation it is in her power to make—and she has gone through a bad time—and I forgive her. [PHYLLIS *releases herself from* THADDEUS *and drops down upon the settee. He sits upon the ottoman, burying his face in his hands.* HELEN *rises, struggling to keep back her tears, and turns to the door.*] I—I'll go up-stairs—if you'll allow me——

ELKIN.

[*Between her and the door.*] Miss Thornhill, you put us in a position of great difficulty——

HELEN.

[*Impatiently.*] I say again, I don't see why. Where is the difficulty? [*To* VALLANCE *and* ELKIN.] If there's a difficulty, it's you gentlemen who are raising it. Let the affair go on as it was going on. [*Turning to* JAMES.] Mr. Mortimore! [*To* ELKIN.] I say, let Mr. James Morti-

more and the others administer the estate as they intended to do. [*To* JAMES, *who has left the fireplace and slowly advanced to her.*] Mr. Mortimore——

ELKIN.

[*To* HELEN.] Then you would have Mr. James Mortimore deliberately swear that he believes his late brother died without leaving a will?

HELEN.

Certainly, if necessary. Who would be hurt by it?

ELKIN.

[*Pursing his lips.*] Miss Thornhill——

HELEN.

[*Hotly.*] Why, which do you think would be the more acceptable to the Almighty—that I should send this poor lady to prison, or that Mr. James should take a false oath?

ELKIN.

H'm! I won't attempt to follow you quite so far. But even then a most important point would remain to be settled.

HELEN.

Even then——?

ELKIN.

Assuming that Mr. James Mortimore did make this affidavit—that he were permitted to make such an affidavit——

HELEN.

Yes?

ELKIN.

What about the disposition of the estate?

HELEN.

[*Nodding, slowly and thoughtfully.*] The—the disposition of the estate——

[STEPHEN *steals over to* PONTING, *and* ROSE, ANN, *and* LOUISA *quietly rise and gather together. They all listen with painful interest.*

ELKIN.

[*To* HELEN.] Morally, at all events, the whole of the late Mr. Mortimore's estate belongs to you.

HELEN.

[*Simply.*] It was his intention that it should do so. [*Looking at* JAMES, *as if inviting him to speak.*] Well——?

JAMES.

[*Stroking his beard.*] Look here, Miss Thornhill. [*Pointing to the chair on the extreme left.*] Sit down a minute. [*She sits.* JAMES *also seats himself, facing her, at the right of the table at the end of the piano.* VALLANCE *joins* ELKIN *and they stand near* HELEN, *occasionally exchanging remarks with each other.*] Look here. [*In a deep, gruff voice.*] There *is* no doubt that my brother Ned's money rightfully belongs to you.

PONTING.

[*Nervously.*] Mortimore——

JAMES.

[*Turning upon him.*] You leave us alone. Don't you interfere. [*To* HELEN.] I've no more doubt about it, Miss Thornhill, than that I'm sitting here. Very good. Say I make the affidavit, and that we—the family—obtain Letters of Administration. What then? The money comes to *us.* Still—it's *yours.* We get hold of it, but it's *yours.* Now!

What if we offer to throw the whole lot, so to speak, into your lap?

STEPHEN.

[*Biting his nails.*] Jim——

JAMES.

[*To* STEPHEN.] Don't you interfere. [*To* HELEN.] I repeat, what if we offer to throw the whole lot into your lap? [*Leaning forward, very earnestly.*] Miss Thornhill——

PONTING.

May I——?

JAMES.

[*To* PONTING.] If you can't be silent——! [*To* HELEN.] Miss Thornhill, we're poor, we Mortimores. I won't say anything about Rose—[*with a sneer*] it wouldn't be polite to the Colonel; nor Tad—you see what he's come to. But Stephen and me—take our case. [*To* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE.] Mr. Vallance—Mr. Elkin—this is sacred. [*To* HELEN.] My dear, we're prominent men in the town, both of us; we're looked up to as being fairly warm and comfortable; but in reality we're not much better off than the others. My trade's being cut into on all sides; Stephen's business has run to seed; we've no capital; we've never had any capital. What we might have saved has been spent on educating our children, and keeping up appearances; and when the time comes for us to be knocked out, there'll be precious little—bar a stroke of luck—precious little for us to end our days on. So this is a terrible disappointment to us—an awful disappointment. Aye, the money's yours—it's yours—but—[*opening his hands*] what are you going to do for the family?

[*There is a pause. The* PONTINGS, STEPHEN, ANN *and* LOUISA *draw a little nearer.*

HELEN.

[*To* JAMES.] Well—since you put it in this way—I'll tell you what I'll do. [*Another pause.*] I'll share with you all.

JAMES.

[*To the others.*] You leave us alone; you leave us alone. [*To* HELEN.] Share and share alike?

HELEN.

[*Thinking.*] Share and share alike—after discharging my obligations.

JAMES.

Obligations?

PONTING *and* STEPHEN.

Obligations?

HELEN.

After carrying out my father's instructions with regard to his old servants.

JAMES.

[*Nodding.*] Oh, aye.

PONTING.

[*Walking about excitedly.*] That's a small matter.

STEPHEN.

[*Also walking about.*] A trifle—a trifle——

PONTING.

Then what it amounts to is this—the estate will be divided into five parts instead of four.

STEPHEN.

Five instead of four—obviously.

HELEN.

[*Still thinking.*] No—into six.

JAMES.

Six?

PONTING *and* STEPHEN.

Six!

ROSE *and* LOUISA.

[*Who with* ANN, *are moving round the head of the piano, to join* PONTING *and* STEPHEN.] Six!

HELEN.

[*Firmly.*] Six. A share must be given, as a memorial of my father, to one of the hospitals in Linchpool.

PONTING *and* STEPHEN.

[*Protestingly.*] Oh——!

ROSE, ANN *and* LOUISA.

Oh——!

PONTING.

Entirely unnecessary.

STEPHEN.

Uncalled for.

HELEN.

I insist.

PONTING.

[*Coming to* HELEN.] My dear Miss Thornhill, believe me—believe me—these cadging hospitals are a great deal too well off as it is.

HELEN.

I insist that a share shall be given to a Linchpool hospital.

PONTING.

I could furnish you with details of maladministration on the part of hospital-boards——

ROSE.

Shocking mismanagement——

STEPHEN.

There's our own hospital——

LOUISA.

A scandal.

STEPHEN.

Our Jubilee hospital——

ANN.

It's scarcely fit to send your servants to.

HELEN.

[*To* JAMES, *rising.*] Mr. Mortimore——

JAMES.

[*Rising, to* PONTING *and the rest.*] Miss Thornhill says that one share of the estate's to go to a Linchpool hospital. D'ye hear? [*Moving towards them authoritatively.*] That's enough.

[PONTING *and* STEPHEN *bustle to the writing-table, where they each seize a sheet of paper and proceed to reckon.* ROSE, ANN *and* LOUISA *surround them.* JAMES *stands by, his hands in his pockets, looking on.*

PONTING.

[*Sitting at the writing-table—in an undertone.*] A hundred and seventy thousand pounds——

STEPHEN.

[*Bending over the table—in an undertone.*] Six into seventeen—two and carry five——

PONTING.

Six into fifty—eight and carry two——

STEPHEN.

Six into twenty——

PONTING.

Three——

[HELEN *seats herself in the chair on the right of the table at the end of the piano.* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE *are now in earnest conversation on the extreme left. While the calculation is going on,* THADDEUS *and* PHYLLIS *raise their heads and look at each other.*

STEPHEN.

Carry two——

PONTING.

Six into twenty again—three and carry two——

STEPHEN.

Again, six into twenty—three and carry two——

PONTING.

Six into forty—six and carry four——

STEPHEN.

Six into forty-eight——

PONTING.

Eight——

STEPHEN.

Twenty-eight thousand, three hundred and thirty-three pounds, six shillings and eight pence.

PONTING.

[*Rising, his paper in his hand.*] Twenty-eight thousand apiece.

THADDEUS.

[*Rising.*] No——

PHYLLIS.

[*Rising.*] No——

THADDEUS.

[*As everybody turns to him.*] No, no—

JAMES.

Eh?

PONTING.

[*To* THADDEUS.] What do you mean, sir?

STEPHEN.

[*To* THADDEUS.] What do you mean?

THADDEUS.

[*Agitatedly.*] I don't take my share—my wife and I don't take our share—we don't touch it——

PHYLLIS.

[*Clinging to* THADDEUS.] We won't touch it—oh, no, no, no, no——!

JAMES.

[*To* THADDEUS.] Don't be a fool—don't be a fool!

THADDEUS.

Fool or no fool—not a penny——

PHYLLIS.

Not a penny of it——

THADDEUS.

Not a penny.

HELEN.

Very well, then. [*In a clear voice.*] Very well; Mr. Thaddeus Mortimore will not accept his share.

PONTING.

[*With alacrity.*] He declines it.

HELEN.

He declines it.

PONTING.

That alters the figures—alters the figures——

STEPHEN.

Very materially.

ROSE.

[*To* ANN *and* LOUISA.] Only five to share instead of six.

ANN.

[*Bewildered.*] I don't understand——

LOUISA.

[*Shaking her arm.*] Five instead of six!

[*Laying his paper on the top of the piano,* PONTING *produces his pocket-pencil and makes a fresh calculation.* STEPHEN *stands at his elbow.* ROSE, ANN *and* LOUISA *gather round them.*

STEPHEN.

[*In an undertone.*] A hundred and seventy thousand——

PONTING.

[*In an undertone.*] *Five* into seventeen——

STEPHEN.

Three——

PONTING.

Five into twenty——

STEPHEN.

Thirty-four thousand exactly.

PONTING.

Thirty-four thousand apiece.

ROSE, ANN *and* LOUISA.

[*To each other.*] Thirty-four thousand!

HELEN.

Wait—wait. Wait, please. [*After a short pause.*] Mr. Thaddeus Mortimore refuses to accept his share. I am sorry—but he appears determined.

THADDEUS.

Determined—determined——

PHYLLIS.

Determined——

HELEN.

That being so, I ask that his share shall be settled upon his boy and girl. [*To* ELKIN.] Mr. Elkin—— [ELKIN *advances to her.*] I suppose an arrangement of that kind can easily be made?

ELKIN.

[*With a shrug.*] Mr. Thaddeus Mortimore can assent to his share being handed over to the trustees of a Deed of Settlement for the benefit of his children, giving a release to the administrator from all claims in respect of his share.

HELEN.

[*Turning to* THADDEUS.] You've no objection to this? [THADDEUS *and* PHYLLIS *stare at* HELEN *dumbly, with parted lips.*] They are great friends of mine—Cyril and Joyce—and I hope they'll remain so. [*A pause.*] Well? You've no right to stand in their light. [*A pause.*] You won't, surely, stand in their light? [*A pause.*] Don't.

[*Again there is silence, and then* PHYLLIS, *leaving* THADDEUS, *totters forward, and drops on her knees before* HELEN, *bowing her head in* HELEN'S *lap.*

PHYLLIS.

[*Weeping.*] Oh-oh-oh——!

[*Calmly,* HELEN *disengages herself from* PHYLLIS, *rises, and walks away to the fireplace.* THADDEUS *lifts* PHYLLIS *from the ground and leads her to the open window. They stand there, facing the garden, she crying upon his shoulder.*

ELKIN.

[*Advancing to the middle of the room, with the air of a man who is about to perform an unpleasant task.*] Miss Thornhill—[HELEN *turns to him*] Mr. Vallance and I—[*to* VALLANCE] Mr. Vallance—[VALLANCE *advances*] Mr. Vallance and I have come to the conclusion that, as all persons interested in this business are *sui juris* and agreeable to the compromise which has been proposed, nobody would be injured by the next-of-kin applying for Letters of Administration.

VALLANCE.

[*To* ELKIN.] Except the Revenue.

ELKIN.

[*Indifferently, with a nod.*] The Revenue.

VALLANCE.

The legacy duty being at three per cent. instead of ten.

ELKIN.

[*Nodding.*] H'm, h'm! [*To* HELEN.] But, my dear young lady, we have also to say that, with the information we possess, we do not see our way clear to act in the matter any further.

VALLANCE.

[*To* JAMES, *who has come forward on the left.*] We certainly could not be parties to the making of an affidavit that the deceased died intestate.

ELKIN.

We couldn't reconcile ourselves to *that.*

VALLANCE.

We leave it, therefore, to the next-of-kin to take their own course for obtaining Letters of Administration.

ELKIN.

In fact, we beg to be allowed to withdraw from the affair altogether. I speak for myself, at any rate.

VALLANCE.

[*Emphatically.*] Altogether.

JAMES.

[*After a pause.*] Oh—all right, Mr. Elkin; all right, Mr. Vallance.

HELEN.

[*To* ELKIN.] Then—do I lose you——?

ELKIN.

I am afraid—for the present——

HELEN.

[*With dignity.*] As you please. I am very grateful to you for what you *have* done for me.

ELKIN.

[*Looking round.*] If I may offer a last word of advice, it is that you should avoid putting the terms of this compromise into writing.

VALLANCE.

[*Assentingly.*] Each party must rely upon the other to fulfil the terms honorably.

ELKIN.

[*To* HELEN.] You have no *legal* right to enforce those terms; but pray remember that, in the event of any breach of faith, there would be nothing to prevent you propounding the will even after Letters of Administration have been granted.

JAMES.

Breach of faith, sir——!

PONTING *and* STEPHEN.

[*Indignantly.*] Oh——!

JAMES.

There's no need, Mr. Elkin——

ELKIN.

[*To* JAMES.] No, no, no—not the slightest, I'm convinced. [*To* HELEN, *taking her hand.*] The little hotel in London—Norfolk Street——?

HELEN.

Till I'm suited with lodgings.

ELKIN.

Mrs. Elkin will write.

HELEN.

My love to her.

[*He smiles at her and leaves her, as* VALLANCE *comes to her and shakes her hand.*

VALLANCE.

[*To* HELEN.] Good-bye.

HELEN.

[*To* VALLANCE.] Good-bye.

ELKIN.

[*To those on the left.*] Good-afternoon.

A MURMUR.

Good-afternoon.

VALLANCE.

[*To those on the left.*] Good-afternoon.

A MURMUR.

Good-afternoon.

[JAMES *has opened the door.* ELKIN *and* VALLANCE, *carrying their bags, go out.* JAMES *follows them, closing the door.*

PONTING.

[*Coming forward.*] Ha! We can replace *those* gentlemen without much difficulty.

STEPHEN.

[*Coming forward.*] Old Crake has gone to pieces and this fellow Vallance is playing ducks and drakes with the practice—ducks and drakes.

PONTING.

[*Offering his hand to* HELEN, *who takes it perfunctorily.*] Greatly indebted to you—greatly indebted to you for meeting us half-way and saving unpleasantness.

STEPHEN.

Pratt is the best lawyer in the town—the best by far.

PONTING.

[*To* HELEN.] Nothing like a compromise, provided it can be arrived at—ah——

STEPHEN.

Without loss of self-respect on both sides.

[JAMES *returns.*

PONTING.

[*To* JAMES.] Mortimore, we'll go back to your house. There are two or three things to talk over——

[ROSE *comes to* HELEN *as* PONTING *goes to* STEPHEN *and* JAMES.

ROSE.

[*Shaking hands with* HELEN.] We sha'n't be settled in Carlos Place till the autumn, but directly we *are* settled——

HELEN.

[*Distantly.*] Thank you.

ROSE.

Everybody flocks to my Tuesdays. Let me have your address and I'll send you a card.

[ROSE *leaves* HELEN, *making way for* LOUISA *and* STEPHEN.

LOUISA.

[*To* HELEN.] Don't forget the Crescent. Whenever you want to visit your dear father's birthplace——

STEPHEN.

[*Benevolently.*] And if there should be any little ceremony over laying the foundation-stone of the new *Times and Mirror* building——

LOUISA.

There's the spare bedroom.

[*They shake hands with her and, making way for* ANN *and* JAMES, *follow the* PONTINGS, *who have gone out.*

ANN.

[*Shaking hands with* HELEN, *gloomily.*] The next time you stay at "Ivanhoe," I hope you'll unpack more than one small trunk. But, there—[*kissing her*] I bear no malice.

[*She follows the others, leaving* JAMES *with* HELEN.

JAMES.

[*To* HELEN, *gruffly, wringing her hand.*] Much obliged to you, my dear; much obliged to you.

HELEN.

[*After glancing over her shoulder, in a whisper.*] Mr. Mortimore——

JAMES.

Eh?

HELEN.

[*With a motion of her head in the direction of* THADDEUS *and* PHYLLIS.] These two—these two——

JAMES.

[*Lowering his voice.*] What about 'em?

HELEN.

She's done a wrong thing, but recollect—you all profit by it. You don't disdain, any of you, to profit by it. [*He looks at her queerly, but straight in the eyes.*] Try to make their lives a little easier for them.

JAMES.

Easier——?

HELEN.

Happier. You can influence the others, if you will. [*A pause.*] Will you?

[*He reflects, shakes her hand again, and goes to the door.*

JAMES.

[*At the door, sharply.*] Tad——! [THADDEUS *turns.*] See you in the morning. Phyllis——! [*She also turns to him, half scared at his tone.*] See you both in the morning. [*Nodding to her.*] Good-bye, old girl.

[*He disappears.* HELEN *is now standing upon the hearth-rug, her hands behind her, looking down into the grate.* THADDEUS *and* PHYLLIS *glance at her; then, guiltily, they too move to the door, passing round the head of the piano.*

PHYLLIS.

[*At the door in a low, hard voice.*] Helen—— [HELEN *partly turns.*] You're leaving to-morrow. I'll keep out of

your way—I'll keep up-stairs in my room—till you've gone.

[*She goes out.* THADDEUS *is following her, when* HELEN *calls to him.*

HELEN.

Mr. Thaddeus—— [*He closes the door and advances to her humbly. She comes forward.*] There's no reason why I should put your wife to that trouble. It's equally convenient to me to return to London this evening. [*He bows.*] Will you kindly ask Kate to pack me?

THADDEUS.

Certainly.

HELEN.

Er—[*thinking*] Mr. Trist had some calls to make after we left the flower-show. If I've gone before he comes back, tell him I'll write——

THADDEUS.

[*Bowing again.*] You'll write.

HELEN.

And explain.

THADDEUS.

[*Under his breath, looking up quickly.*] Explain——!

HELEN.

Explain, among other things, that I've yielded to the desire of the family——

THADDEUS.

Desire——?

HELEN.

That I should accept a share of my father's property.

THADDEUS.

[*Falteringly.*] Thank you—thank you——

HELEN.

[*After a while.*] That's all, I think.

THADDEUS.

[*Offering his hand to her.*] I—I wish you every happiness, Miss Thornhill. [*She places her hand in his.*] I—I wish you every happiness.

[*She inclines her head, in acknowledgment and again he goes to the door; and again, turning away to the round table where she trifles with a book, she calls him.*

HELEN.

Oh, Mr. Tad—— [*He halts.*] Mr. Tad, I propose that we allow six months to pass in complete silence—six months from to-day——

THADDEUS.

[*Dully, not understanding.*] Six months—silence——?

HELEN.

I mean, without my hearing from your wife. Then, perhaps, she—she will send me another invitation——

THADDEUS.

[*Leaving the door, staring at her.*] Invitation——?

HELEN.

By that time, we shall, all of us, have forgotten a great deal—sha'n't we? [*Facing him.*] You'll say that to her for me?

[*He hesitates, then he takes her hands and, bending over them, kisses them repeatedly.*

THADDEUS.

God bless you. God bless you. God bless you.

HELEN.

[*Withdrawing her hands.*] Find—Kate——

[*Once more he makes for the door.*

THADDEUS.

[*Stopping half-way and pulling himself together.*] Miss Thornhill—my wife—my wife—you've seen her at a disadvantage—a terrible disadvantage. Few—few pass through life without being seen—once—or oftener—at a disadvantage. She—she's a splendid woman—a splendid woman—a splendid wife and mother. [*Moving to the door.*] They haven't appreciated her—the family haven't appreciated her. They've treated her abominably; for sixteen years she's been treated abominably. [*At the door.*] But I've never regretted my marriage—[*defiantly*] I've never regretted it—never, for a single moment—never regretted it—never—never regretted it——

[*He disappears. She goes to the table at the end of the piano and takes up her drawing-block and box of crayons. As she does so,* TRIST *lets himself into the garden. She pauses, listening, and presently he enters the room at the open window.*

TRIST.

[*Throwing his hat on the round table.*] Ah——!

HELEN.

[*Animatedly.*] Mr. Trist——

TRIST.

Yes?

HELEN.

Run out to the post-office for me—send a telegram in my name——

TRIST.

With pleasure.

HELEN.

Gregory's Hotel, Norfolk Street, Strand, London—the manager. Miss Thornhill will arrive to-night—prepare her room——

TRIST.

[*His face falling.*] To-night!

HELEN.

I've altered my plans. Gregory's Hotel—Gregory's——

TRIST.

[*Picking up his hat.*] Norfolk Street, Strand——

HELEN.

[*At the door.*] Mr. Trist—I want you to know—I—I've come into a small fortune.

TRIST.

A fortune——?

HELEN.

Nearly thirty thousand pounds.

TRIST.

Thirty thousand——!

HELEN.

They've persuaded me—persuaded me to take a share of my poor father's money.

TRIST.

I—I'm glad.

HELEN.

You—you think I'm doing rightly?

TRIST.

[*Depressed.*] Why—of course.

[*She opens the door and he goes to the window.*

HELEN.

Mr. Trist——! [*She comes back into the room.*] Mr. Trist——! [*He approaches her.*] Mr. Trist—don't—don't——

TRIST.

What?

HELEN.

[*Her head drooping.*] Don't let this make any difference between us—will you——?

[*She raises her eyes to his and they stand looking at each other in silence. Then she turns away abruptly and leaves the room as he hurries through the garden.*

THE END.

MID-CHANNEL

CRITICAL PREFACE *

Mid-Channel was more popular in the theatre than *The Thunderbolt;* but it did not attract so large a patronage to the box-office as many of Pinero's earlier plays. When the piece was first produced in London, at the St. James's Theatre, on September 2nd, 1909, with that flawless actress, Irene Vanbrugh, in the part of Zoe Blundell, it achieved a notable *succès d'estime* and enjoyed a considerable run; but, from the merely commercial point of view, the record of the piece was comparatively disappointing. Later, when *Mid-Channel* was reproduced in the United States, with the popular Ethel Barrymore in the leading rôle, it attracted a larger public, and drew an excellent attendance for more than a year. Commenting on this circumstance—and including Mr. Bernard Shaw and Mr. Henry Arthur Jones within the scope of his reflection—Sir Arthur said to the present commentator, with a witty smile, "If it were not for America, we couldn't keep alive." . . . He was naturally interested in Miss Barrymore's performance of Zoe Blundell, which he had never witnessed. I had seen it half a dozen times, and was prepared to answer his eager questions concerning what she did at one point and another in the progress of the play. I admired Miss Barrymore's portrayal; and the only thing I had to say against it was that she did not suggest that underlying note of innate vulgarity which seemed to me a necessary trait of Zoe Blundell's character. "I see!", said the author, "Miss Barrymore made Zoe more ladylike and lovable than she actually is. . . . Well, maybe that's another reason why the play did so well in America."

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I feel inclined to emphasise the fact that neither *The Thunderbolt* nor *Mid-Channel* made much money in the theatre, because this detail is important, not only from the commercial, but also from the critical, point of view. These two plays were written at the culmination of Pinero's career [he was fifty-four years old when *Mid-Channel* was produced]; and they represent his mind at its most completely characteristic moment. In 1910 he told me very frankly that he had written these two plays primarily to please himself, and that, in doing so, he had paid no attention to the calculable task of pleasing the public, which he had grown to regard, after many years of service, as a secondary duty.

No commentator should be tempted to deny that it is a duty for the dramatist to succeed at the box-office. Unless a play makes money, it will be withdrawn. If it is withdrawn, it will cease to exist, as a living entity behind the footlights; and, in that event, the loss to humanity will be all the greater in proportion to the importance of the content of the play and the sincerity of its intention. Sir Arthur Pinero, of course, is fully aware of this principle, although it has not yet impressed itself, apparently, upon the mind of so promising a dramatist as Mr. John Galsworthy—the worthy author of many estimable dramas which the theatre-going public persistently refuses to attend. In composing *Mid-Channel* and *The Thunderbolt* "to please himself," Pinero did not presume to exalt himself above his public; but he was willing to sacrifice the extensive popularity which had been eagerly accorded to several of his lighter and more "entertaining" pieces.

Sir Arthur told me that he had come to a point in his development where the only characters who acutely interested him were mature people whose lives had "somehow gone awry." He liked to speculate upon the difference between what they were and what they might have been. He was no longer interested by inexperienced characters whose lives lay all before them,—although he was fully aware that the

theatre was patronised mainly by young people, and that young, unspotted characters were more popular than any others on the stage. By this conversation, I was reminded of the case of Rembrandt. Rembrandt, in painting portraits, preferred to show a face, not merely as a record of what the sitter looked like at the moment, but also as a reminiscent summing-up of all that the sitter had previously been. He was not especially successful in painting young girls, whose experience of life was still before them. He was most successful in depicting mature people, whose experience of life was already written in their faces; and his greatest portraits were pictures of old people with a memorable past.

Disregarding, now, the immediate response of the ticket-buying public, I feel inclined to consider *Mid-Channel* as perhaps the greatest of Pinero's many plays, and I am able to report that the author—despite his lifelong habit of closing his mind to a discussion of the comparative merits of his several endeavours—has confessed a special fondness for this composition,—a fondness which is shared, in his own memory, by *Iris* and *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith.* Time alone can pick out with finality the best play of Pinero; but if I were suddenly required to adduce evidence in support of the unexpected statement that Pinero, at his highest, is an abler dramatist than Ibsen, I should toss *Mid-Channel* on the carpet and appeal to futurity for a verdict without prejudice. Inviting the more leisurely decision of commentators yet to come, I am willing now to risk the statement that *Mid-Channel* is a greater play than *Hedda Gabler* or *A Doll's House.*

Mid-Channel, in the first place, discusses a "theme" which is eternally important to every member of the theatre-going public; and this is the primary point which leads the present editor to set this drama, in his own opinion, higher than *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* or *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith.* The characters, though sharply individualised, are more usual, and less eccentric, than those that we are ordinarily

invited to meet in a drama by Pinero. We can put ourselves, without appreciable effort, in their places, and can easily imagine that what is actually shown upon the stage is really happening to us. And, if we feel inclined to hate the characters exhibited upon the stage, it is only because these characters are too closely related to ourselves,—with an intimacy that may seem a little inconsiderate.

Mid-Channel, moreover, is not only important in its subject-matter, but also monumental in its execution. It appeals to the literary student by virtue of its "theme"; it appeals to the casual public by virtue of its pathos and its sheer theatric strength; and it appeals to all playwrights by virtue of its meticulous manipulation of many of the technical devices that the world has learned throughout the long and gradual development of the craft of making plays.

Consider, for example, the handling of the troublous element of setting. In presenting the text of *Mid-Channel* to the reading public, the editor has decided to reproduce the stage-maps designed originally by the author. The first and second acts are set in the same room; but the lapse of time, between winter and summer, is indicated immediately to the eye by a re-arrangement of the furniture. In both acts, a vivid sense of the adjoining room is indicated by the practical employment of two doors which are set up at the right hand of the spectator.

The setting of the fourth and final act is exceedingly important; for this setting finally determines the suicide of Zoe Blundell. Sophocles (the greatest dramatist of ancient days) and Shakespeare (the greatest dramatist of mediæval days) tried always to imagine suicides as motivated by considerations that swam immune from any question of concordant place and time. But the bulk of modern evidence shows clearly that people do not actually kill themselves unless they happen to be in an appropriate place at an appropriate time, when the mood for suicide is on them. Zoe Blundell is impelled to kill herself because, at a desperate moment, she

is driven forth upon a balcony which dizzily invites a downward dive to quick oblivion. This tragic outcome is conditioned by the setting; and, conversely—to revert to the realm of critical conjecture—this determinative setting must have been suggested to the author's mind by several inherent factors in the antecedent series of events.

In the gradual unfolding of the fourth act, the various devices by which the final suicide of Zoe Blundell is made to seem inevitable should be admired by all students of the technique of the modern drama. When the curtain rises, the back-drop, by revealing the top of a building so generally known as the Albert Hall, suggests at once the height, above the street, of Lenny Ferris's apartment. Ethel Pierpoint strolls forth upon the balcony, and describes the "tots" of people that she sees below; and her stodgy mother soon grows dizzy at the prospect. This emphasis upon the disconcerting height of Lenny's balcony is fortified by a subtle exposition of the fact that Lenny's bedroom (to the right of the spectator) can yield no other exit except upon this dangerous balcony.

The first act of *Mid-Channel* opens with a conventional series of questions and answers between Ethel Pierpoint and her mother. In 1910 I accused the author of having adopted a labour-saving device in this respect. Sir Arthur answered with his customary frankness. "After the elaborate exposition of *The Thunderbolt,*" he said to me, "it no longer seemed worth while to begin *Mid-Channel* with a clever passage. It is difficult to be clever, but it is not impossible. There are certain things that must be told to the audience, as quickly and conveniently as possible, at the outset of any play. Why not tell these things quite frankly and get them over with?" . . .

The subject of *Mid-Channel* is the hopeless marital misunderstanding which afflicts in middle life a rugged, rather brutal business man, named Theodore Blundell, and his wife, Zoe, an idle, pleasure-loving woman, who drifts aimlessly

along the line of least resistance. At the outset of their married life, they made the mistake of resolving not to encumber themselves with children. Now, after a dozen years, they have no common interests; and though they are rather fond of each other, they continually bore themselves into nervous tiffs and annoyed recriminations. The first act expounds this basic situation distinctly and completely; and at the curtain fall, there is a flare-up and the husband leaves the house.

The rest of the play happens five months later. The second act and the third act are admirably balanced—the one exhibiting the effect upon the wife, the other the effect upon the husband, of the period of separation. Each has become —to use a phrase of their own—"rather a rotter." Zoe has dallied in Italy with a young and caddish cub to whom she has succumbed in a moment of weakness; and Theodore has taken up with a mercenary lady notorious for a succession of divorces. At the close of the second act, Zoe sends her lover away and insists that he shall marry a young girl who is in love with him; and during the third act, Theodore dismisses the merry lady of many men. At the climax of the third act, Zoe and Theodore are brought together by a mutual friend and left to patch up the fragments of their lives. The husband admits frankly that he has sinned, and the wife forgives him; but when she adds that they are both sinners, he looks upon her in an appalling quietude of absolute estrangement, and then sends her back to her lover. She arrives at the latter's rooms to find that he has already obeyed her behest and engaged himself to marry the young girl who is fond of him. There is, beyond the windows, a balcony very high above a public square; and from this Zoe casts herself to the pavement below.

The ultimate suicide of Zoe Blundell is technically "planted" by her very first speech in the very first act. Chatting about the weather [and what topic could seem more natural for an unpremeditated chat?] Zoe says, "Why is it

that more people commit suicide in summer than in winter?" And three acts later—at the very conclusion of the drama—Peter Mottram states, "She told me once it would be in the *winter* time——!"

This repetition recurs as an echo of the earlier statement; and a consideration of this single point calls up for admiration the "echo-system" which Pinero has established throughout the composition of this play. Every detail of the piece is nicely related to every other; and many passages produce a three-fold effect:—first, by and for themselves; second, by reminiscence of something that has preceded them; and third, by anticipation of something that is yet to come. Considering the text from the standpoint of this three-fold technical formula, there is scarcely a wasted line in the entire composition. Everything that is said or done upon the stage counts harmoniously toward a common purpose.

The underlying thesis of *Mid-Channel* is indicated very early in a charming off-hand passage in which Sir Arthur pays a delicate tribute to his friend and colleague, Sir James Barrie. Barrie is, obviously, the man who has "the power of imagining children—bringing them to life! Just by shutting the door, and sitting down at his writing-table, and saying to his brain, 'Now, then! I'm ready for them!'" The fact that the one thing that is most the matter with the thwarted Zoe Blundell is that she had agreed with her husband, at the outset of their married life, not to encumber herself with any "brats of children," is not emphasised, in all its poignancy, until the climax of the third act of the drama; but it is subtly indicated in this early passage of comment on an hypothetic current play that may be easily identified with *Peter Pan.*

Students of technique will appreciate particularly the calculated timeliness accorded to Lenny Ferris and to Theo Blundell for their first entrances upon the stage before the gathered public. The actors chosen to depict each of these contrasted characters enjoy the opportunity of entering upon

a cue that has been cleverly planned to stimulate the interest of the audience.

The title of *Mid-Channel* is contributed by a *raisonneur* during the course of a carefully expository passage in the initial act. The Honorable Peter Mottram is the most ingratiating of Pinero's long series of *prédicateurs,* with the possible exception of Cayley Drummle, in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.* Peter Mottram is emphatically human, and is clearly distinguished in character from the author of the play, although he expresses, in the main, the author's sentiments in regard to the progress of the action.

In *Mid-Channel,* Sir Arthur indicates, once more, his persistent sense of the tragedy inherent in the process of what is commonly called "social climbing." The Blundells, inspired with an overmastering desire to "get on," have amassed a lot of money; but their original vulgarity has merely been accentuated by the apparent improvement of their social station. As a satirist of contemporary society, Pinero has chosen, as his most recurrent thesis, the theme that vulgarity is innately vulgar and that nothing can be done to cure it.

In recent years, as well, the mind of Pinero has been preoccupied with the abiding tragedy of middle age, which results from the fact that the virtuous efforts of the present cannot possibly eradicate the errors of the past. What we are, at any moment, is merely the sum-total of all that we have ever been; and people who are caught, like the Blundells, in mid-channel, cannot escape the lingering effects of false decisions made a decade, or a couple of decades, in the past. This is the reason why those passages which wistfully refer to the vanished days "up north," when the characters were merely "getting on," appeal so poignantly to the average auditor.

The fairness of characterisation in this play remains remarkable to the disinterested commentator. Lenny Ferris, for example, is undeniably a cad; yet his case is stated by

the author without prejudice against him. His speeches in the second act are irresistibly appealing, upon purely human grounds; and, throughout the troublous progress of the last act, this "unsympathetic" person shows himself to be a veritable gentleman.

Pinero, in composing *Mid-Channel,* admitted no surrender to the predilections of the theatre-going public. He imagined certain people doing certain things, and told the truth about them. The resultant fabric is an absolute and faultless masterpiece of structure. It is solidly, compactly built. No material is wasted: every line and every gesture seems to count. Every detail of the piece is nicely related to every other; and many passages produce a three-fold effect,—first by immediate interest, second, by reminiscence, and, third, by prophecy. The characters are analysed with a thoroughness that is almost terrible. There is comparatively little objective action in the piece; there is, instead, a steady gathering of intense internal conflict. The dialogue is masterly in easy fluency,—crisp and pointed, and nervously concise. It is not at all excessive to assert that no finer dramatic composition has been written in the English language within the first two decades of the twentieth century.

C. H.

MID-CHANNEL

A PLAY, IN FOUR ACTS

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

THEODORE BLUNDELL
THE HONOURABLE PETER MOTTRAM
LEONARD FERRIS
WARREN, *Servant at Lancaster Gate*
COLE, *Servant at the Flat in Cavendish Square*
RIDEOUT, *Mr. Ferris's Servant*
UPHOLSTERERS

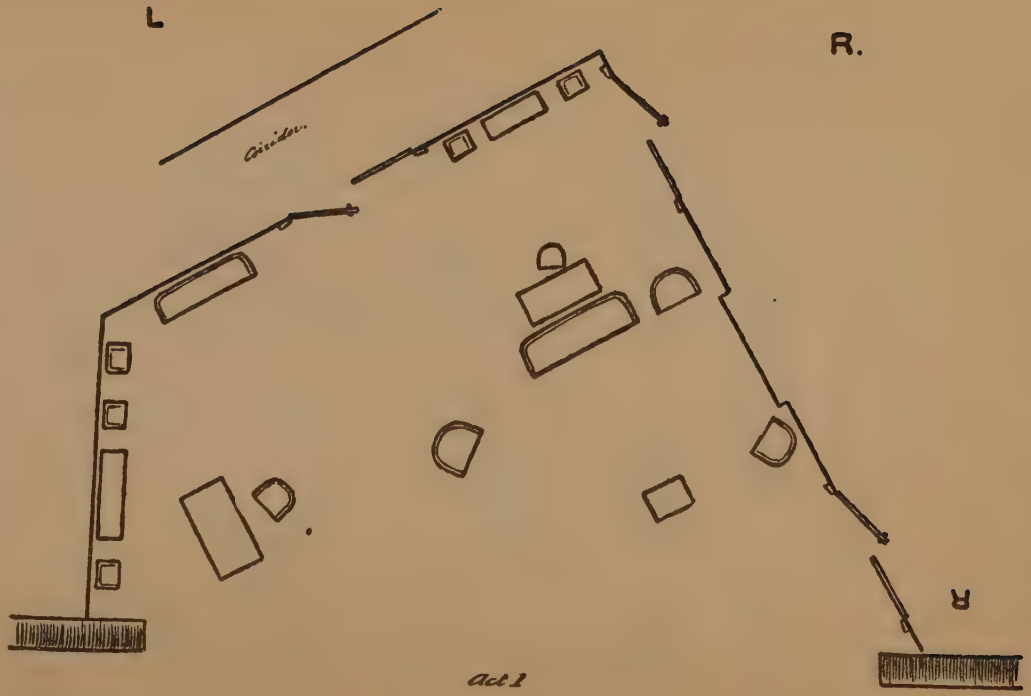
ZOE BLUNDELL
MRS. PIERPOINT
ETHEL PIERPOINT
MRS. ANNERLY
LENA

The scene is laid in London. The events of the First Act take place on an afternoon in January. The rest of the action occurs on a day in the following June.

MID-CHANNEL

Original cast, as first disclosed at the St. James's Theatre, September 2nd, 1909.

THEODORE BLUNDELL . .	*Mr. Lyn Harding*
THE HON. PETER MOTTRAM	*Mr. C. M. Lowne*
LEONARD FERRIS . . .	*Mr. Eric Maturin*
WARREN (Servant at Lancaster Gate)	*Mr. A. E. Drinkwater*
COLE (Servant at the Flat in Cavendish Square) . .	*Mr. Stuart Dennison*
RIDEOUT (Mr. Ferris's servant)	*Mr. Sydney Hamilton*
UPHOLSTERERS	*Mr. Owen Nares* *Mr. T. Weguelin*
ZOE BLUNDELL	*Miss Irene Vanbrugh*
MRS. PIERPOINT	*Miss Kate Serjeantson*
ETHEL PIERPOINT . . .	*Miss Rosalie Toller*
MRS. ANNERLY	*Miss Nina Sevening*
LENA	*Miss Ruth Maitland*
A MAIDSERVANT . . .	*Miss Faith Celli*


L
R.
Act 1

MID-CHANNEL

THE FIRST ACT

The scene is a drawing-room, decorated and furnished in the French style. In the wall opposite the spectator there is a door, the upper part of which is glazed. A silk curtain hangs across the glazed panels, but above the curtain there is a view of the corridor beyond. The fireplace, where a bright fire is burning, is in the wall on the right. There is a door on the further side of the fireplace, another on the nearer side. Both these doors are supposed to lead to a second drawing-room.

On either side of the fireplace there is an arm-chair, and on the further side, standing out in the room, is a settee. Some illustrated papers of the popular sort are lying upon the arm-chair next to the settee. Behind the settee are an oblong table and a chair. In the middle of the room, on the left of the settee and facing the fire, is another arm-chair; and on the left of the arm-chair on the nearer side of the fireplace there is a fauteuil-stool. A writing-table, with a chair before it, stands on the left-hand side of the room, and among the objects on the writing-table are a hand mirror and some photographs in frames. Other pieces of furniture, of a more formal kind than those already specified, fill spaces against the walls. One of these, on the left of the glazed door, is a second settee.

The room is lighted only by the blaze of the fire, and the corridor also is in semi-darkness.

[NOTE:—*Throughout, "right" and "left" are the spectators' right and left, not the actor's.*]

[*The corridor is suddenly lighted up. Then* WARREN *enters at the glazed door and switches on the light in the room. He is followed by* MRS. PIERPOINT, *a pleasant-looking, middle-aged lady, and by* ETHEL, *a pretty girl of five-and-twenty.*

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To the servant.*] You are sure Mrs. Blundell will be in soon?

WARREN.

She said half-past four, ma'am.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

It's that now, isn't it?

WARREN.

Just upon, ma'am.

[WARREN *withdraws, closing door.*

ETHEL.

What beautiful rooms these are!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Money!

ETHEL.

I always feel I'm in Paris when I'm here, in some smart house in the Champs-Elysées—not at Lancaster Gate. What *is* Mr. Blundell, mother?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

A stockbroker.

ETHEL.

Stockbroker?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Blundell—something-or-other—and Mottram. He goes to the City every morning.

ETHEL.

I know that. But I've never heard him, or Zoe, mention the Stock Exchange.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Sitting on the settee by the fireplace.*] Prosperous stockbrokers and their wives—those who move in a decent set—*don't* mention the Stock Exchange.

ETHEL.

Then that nice person, Mr. Mottram, is a stockbroker too?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Of course, dear. He's the "Mottram" of the firm.

ETHEL.

And *he's* the son of a peer.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Peers' sons are common enough in the City now-a-days—and peers, for that matter.

ETHEL.

[*Moving to the fireplace and warming her hands.*] Zoe is a doctor's daughter.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Has she given you leave to call her Zoe?

ETHEL.

Yes, last week—asked me to. I'm so glad; I've taken such a liking to her.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

She was a Miss Tucker. Her father practised in New Cavendish Street. He was a great gout man.

ETHEL.

You *are* full of information, mother.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Emma Lawton was giving me the whole history of the Blundells at lunch to-day. She has money, of her own.

ETHEL.

Zoe?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Dr. Tucker left sixty or seventy thousand pounds, and she came in for it all. But they'd got on before then.

ETHEL.

H'm! There are stockbrokers and stockbrokers, I suppose.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Straight and crooked, as in every other business or profession.

ETHEL.

I do think, though, that a girl in Zoe's position might have chosen somebody slightly more refined than Mr. Blundell.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

What's wrong with him? He's extremely amiable and inoffensive.

ETHEL.

Amiable!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

He strikes me as being so.

ETHEL.

I don't call it particularly amiable or inoffensive in a husband to be as snappy with his wife as he is with Zoe.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Snappy?

ETHEL.

Irritable—impatient.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Oh, I dare say there's an excellent understanding between them. They've been married a good many years.

ETHEL.

Thirteen, she's told me.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Married people are allowed to be out of humor with each other occasionally.

ETHEL.

A considerable allowance must be made for Mr. Blundell, I'm afraid.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

You're prejudiced, Ethel. I've seen her just as snappy, as you term it, with him.

ETHEL.

You can't blame her, if she's provoked.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Nor him, if he's provoked. The argument cuts both ways——

ETHEL.

[*Listening.*] Sssh!

[ZOE, *a charming, animated, bright-eyed woman, wearing her hat and some costly furs, enters quickly at the glazed door.*

ZOE.

Delightful!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Rising.*] Your servant insisted on our coming up.

ZOE.

[*Shaking hands with* MRS. PIERPOINT.] If he hadn't I'd have wrung his neck. [*Kissing* ETHEL.] How are you, dear? [*Stripping off her gloves.*] The weather! Isn't it filthy! Do you remember what the sun's like? I had the blinds drawn all over the house at eleven o'clock this morning. What's the good of trying to make-believe it's day? [*Taking off her coat.*] Do sit down. Ugh! Why is it that more people commit suicide in summer than in winter?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Resuming her seat on the settee by the fire.*] Do they?

ETHEL.

[*Sitting upon the fauteuil-stool.*] Why, yes, mother; what-do-you-call-them?—statistics—prove it.

ZOE.

[*Throwing her coat and gloves upon the settee at the back and unpinning her hat.*] You'll see, when I put an end to myself, it will be in the winter time.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

My dear!

ETHEL.

Zoe!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

If you are in this frame of mind, why don't you pack your trunks and fly?

ZOE.

Fly?

ETHEL.

Mother means cut it.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Ethel!

ZOE.

[*Tossing her hat on to the settee and taking up the hand-mirror from the writing-table and adjusting her hair.*] Don't scold her; she picks up her slang from me.

ETHEL.

Evil communications——!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

I mean, go abroad for a couple of months—Egypt——

ETHEL.

Mother, how horrid of you! I should miss her terribly.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Cairo—Assouan——

ZOE.

[*Looking into the hand-glass steadily.*] That's funny. I have been thinking lately of "cutting it."

MRS. PIERPOINT.

But I suppose it would have to be without your busy husband.

ZOE.

[*Replacing the mirror.*] Yes, it would be without Theo. [*Turning to* MRS. PIERPOINT *and* ETHEL *and rattling on again.*] Well! How have you been amusing yourselves? You wretches, you haven't been near me since Monday, either of you. Done anything—seen anything?

ETHEL.

Nothing.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* ZOE.] If *you're* under the weather, there's some excuse for me.

ZOE.

[*Walking about restlessly.*] Oh, but I will keep moving, though the heavens fall. I've been to the theatre every night this week, and supped out afterwards. They've opened such a ripping restaurant in Jermyn Street. [*Pausing.*] You haven't seen the new play at the St. Martin's, then?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

No.

ETHEL.

I want to, badly.

ZOE.

I'll take you. We'll make up a party. [*Scribbling a memorandum at the writing-table.*] I'll tell Lenny Ferris to get seats.

ETHEL.

Good business!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Ethel!

ZOE.

It's all about children—kiddies. There are the sweetest little tots in it. Two especially—a tiny, round-eyed boy and a mite of a girl with straw-coloured hair—you feel you must clamber on to the stage and hug them. You feel you *must!*

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Aren't there any grown-ups?

ZOE.

[*Dropping into the arm-chair facing the fire.*] Oh, yes; they bore me.

ETHEL.

I was reading the story to you, mother——

ZOE.

The story's no account—it's the kiddies. The man who wrote the thing must be awfully fond of children. I wonder

whether he has any little 'uns. If he hasn't, it's of no consequence to him; he can imagine them. What a jolly gift! Fancy! To have the power of imagining children—bringing them to life! Just by shutting the door, and sitting down at your writing-table, and saying to your brain, "Now, then! I'm ready for them——!" [*Breaking off.*] Ring the bell, Ethel. [ETHEL *rises, and, going to the fireplace, rings the bell.*] Let's have tea.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

I'm afraid we can't stay for tea. I've promised to be at old Miss Fremantle's at five o'clock. Ethel——

ETHEL.

Yes, mother?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Go down-stairs for a few minutes. I want a little private conversation with Mrs. Blundell.

ETHEL.

[*Surprised.*] Private conversation!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

If she won't think me too troublesome.

ZOE.

[*Rising and opening the nearer door on the right—to* ETHEL.] Come in here. There's a lovely fire. [*Disappearing*]. I'll switch the light on.

ETHEL.

[*Following* ZOE—*at the door.*] What is it about, mother?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Rising.*] Now, don't be inquisitive, Ethel.

ZOE.

[*From the adjoining room.*] Come along!

[ETHEL *goes into the next room.* WARREN *enters at the glazed door.*

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* WARREN.] Mrs. Blundell rang for tea.

WARREN.

Very good, ma'am.

[WARREN *withdraws as* ZOE *returns.*

MRS. PIERPOINT.

We sha'n't be heard?

ZOE.

[*Closing the door.*] No.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

It's really most improper of me to bother you in this way.

ZOE.

[*Advancing to* MRS. PIERPOINT.] Can I be of any use to you?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Well, yes, you can. You can give me—what shall I call it?—a hint——

ZOE.

[*Sitting on the fauteuil-stool.*] A hint?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

On a subject that concerns Ethel. [*Sitting in the chair facing the fire.*] We're quite new friends of yours, dear Mrs. Blundell—is it six weeks since we dined at the Darrells'——?

ZOE.

There or thereabouts.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

A fortnight or so before Christmas, wasn't it? But my girl has formed a great attachment to you, and I fancy you are inclined to be interested in her.

ZOE.

Rather! She and I are going to be tremendous pals.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

That's splendid. Now, don't laugh at me for my extreme cautiousness, if you can help it.

ZOE.

Cautiousness?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Tell me—as one woman to another—do you consider it advisable for Ethel to see much of Mr. Ferris?

ZOE.

Advisable?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Oh, I've no doubt he's a highly respectable young man, as young men go—I'm not implying anything to the contrary——

ZOE.

Is she seeing much of Mr. Ferris?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

She meets him here.

ZOE.

Ah, yes.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

And he has suddenly taken to dropping in to tea with us pretty regularly; and twice this week—twice—he has sent her some magnificent flowers—magnificent.

ZOE.

Dear old Lenny!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

There's something in his manner, too—one can't describe it——

ZOE.

[*A little ruefully.*] Ha! Ha, ha, ha!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

I *am* amusing you.

ZOE.

No, no. I beg your pardon. [*Rising and going to the fire.*] Somehow I've never pictured Lenny with a wife.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

It may be only an excess of politeness on his part; there mayn't be the least foundation for my suspicions.

ZOE.

I suppose every married woman believes that her bachelor chums will remain bachelors.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

And pray, dear Mrs. Blundell, don't take me for a match-making mother. I've no desire to lose my girl yet awhile, I assure you. But I want to know, naturally—it's my duty to know—exactly who and what are the men who come into my drawing-room.

ZOE.

Why, naturally.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

And it occurred to me that, as we made Mr. Ferris's acquaintance in your house, you wouldn't object to giving me, as I put it, the merest hint——

ZOE.

Ethel—what about her? Does she like him?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

It's evident she doesn't dislike him. But she's not a girl who would be in a hurry to confide in anybody over a love affair, not even in her mother. True, there may be nothing to confide, in the present case. I repeat, I may be altogether mistaken. At the same time——

ZOE.

You wish me to advise you as to whether Lenny Ferris should be encouraged.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Whether he should be cold-shouldered—I prefer that expression.

ZOE.

Very well; I'll furnish you with his character, dear Mrs. Pierpoint, with pleasure.

[LEONARD FERRIS, *a fresh, boyish young man, enters at the glazed door, with the air of one who is at home.*

LEONARD.

Hallo!

ZOE.

[*Just as carelessly.*] Hallo, Len!

LEONARD.

[*Shaking hands with* MRS. PIERPOINT.] How d'ye do? How's Miss Ethel?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Inclining her head.*] Thank you——

LEONARD.

[*Rubbing his hands together.*] Here's a day!

ZOE.

[*Taking his hand.*] Your hands are frozen.

LEONARD.

[*Going to the fire.*] I drove my car up here.

ZOE.

You're crazy. [*Sitting on the settee by the fire.*] You never rang me up this morning, to ask if I was tired.

LEONARD.

Wire was engaged. First-rate night, last night.

ZOE.

[*Languidly.*] The summit. Lenny——

LEONARD.

Eh?

ZOE.

Mrs. Pierpoint and I are talking secrets. Go into the next room for a second.

LEONARD.

[*Genially.*] Sha'n't if there isn't a fire.

ZOE.

Of course there's a fire. Things ain't so bad in the City as all that.

LEONARD.

[*At the nearer door on the right.*] Any tea?

ZOE.

By-and-by. You'll find somebody in there you know.

LEONARD.

[*Going into the room.*] Who?

ZOE.

[*Calling out.*] Shut the door. [*The door is closed.*] Talk of the——!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Bless me, I hope not!

ZOE.

No, I shouldn't turn him in there at this moment if he wasn't what he is—the dearest boy in the world—should I?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Boy——?

ZOE.

He's thirty-two. A man of two-and-thirty *is* a boy to a woman of—to an old married woman. He's the simplest, wholesomest, best-natured fellow living. If you had him for a son-in-law, you'd be lucky.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

It's a relief to me, at any rate——

ZOE.

And I should lose one of my tame robins.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Tame robins?

ZOE.

[*Rising and going over to the writing-table and taking up two of the photographs.*] I always have his photo on my table—his and Peter Mottram's. Peter Mottram is my husband's partner—you've met him here. I call them my tame robins. They come and eat crumbs off my window-sill. I've no end of tame robins—men chums—but these two are my specials. [*Replacing the photographs.*] Well! If Lenny ever goes, I shall have to promote Harry Estridge or Jim Mallandain or Cossy Rawlings.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Who has risen and followed* ZOE *to the writing-table.*] But why should Mr. Ferris ever "go" completely?

ZOE.

[*Smiling.*] Oh, when a robin marries, Jenny doesn't share him with another wren. Not much!

[WARREN *enters at the glazed door with a female servant. They carry in the tea and lay it upon the table behind the settee by the fire.*

ZOE.

[*After glancing at the servants—dropping her voice.*] I'd better finish drawing up the prospectus, while I'm at it.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Prospectus?

ZOE.

He's got two thousand a year. Both his people are dead. There's an aunt in the country who may leave him a bit extra; but she's a cantankerous old cat and, in my opinion, charity'll have every *sou*. Still, two thousand a year——

MRS. PIERPOINT.

I oughtn't to hear any more. But you understand, don't you——?

ZOE.

Perfectly. And he lives in a comfy little flat behind the Albert Hall and is mad on motor-cars. He's invented a wonderful wheel which is to give the knock to pneumatics. If anything will bring him to ruin, that will. [*Walking away towards the tea-table laughingly.*] There!

WARREN.

Tea is served, ma'am.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* ZOE, *who returns to her.*] I'm exceedingly obliged to you. You won't breathe a word to Ethel?

ZOE.

Not a syllable. It would break my heart, but I hope it'll come off, for her sake.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

She's a sweet, sensible child.

ZOE.

And as for him, I'll tell you this for your comfort—I'm honestly certain that Lenny Ferris would be the sort of husband that lasts.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

That lasts? What do you mean?

ZOE.

Oh—never mind. [*Gaily.*] Tea! [*The servants have withdrawn. She runs across to the further door on the right, opens it, and calls.*] Tea! [*Seating herself at the tea-table.*] Are you firm about going on?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

It's Lizzie Fremantle's birthday. She's Ethel's godmother. [*To* ETHEL, *who enters with* LEONARD.] Are you ready, Ethel?

ETHEL.

[*To* MRS. PIERPOINT.] Must we?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Now, my dear——!

ZOE.

[*To* LEONARD.] Lenny, you've got to get tickets for the St. Martin's and take the whole crowd of us.

LEONARD.

[*With a wry face.*] That kids' play again!

ZOE.

Very well; Peter will do it.

LEONARD.

No, no; right you are.

ZOE.

I stand.

LEONARD.

Rot!

ZOE.

Then Peter has the job. [*To the ladies.*] We'll ask Peter Mottram to be one of us anyhow.

LEONARD.

The supper's mine, then.

ZOE.

Anything for peace. [*Shaking hands with* MRS. PIERPOINT, *who comes to her.*] Monday night?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

You're a great deal too good.

[LEONARD *has opened the glazed door and is now in the corridor.* MRS. PIERPOINT *joins him.*

LEONARD.

[*To* MRS. PIERPOINT, *as they disappear.*] Got a vehicle?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

My venerable four-wheeler—the oldest friend I have in London——

ETHEL.

[*To* ZOE, *who rises.*] What did mother have to say to you so mysteriously?

ZOE.

Er—she wants me to consult Theo about something.

ETHEL.

Her railway shares?

ZOE.

[*Nodding.*] H'm.

ETHEL.

[*Satisfied.*] Oh? Good-bye.

ZOE.

When are we to have a nice long jaw together—just you and I?

ETHEL.

Mother won't let me out alone in these fogs.

ZOE.

Fog or no fog, try and shunt her to-morrow.

ETHEL.

I'll do my best.

ZOE.

I'll be in all the morning. [*They turn their heads towards the door, listening.*] Lenny's whistling for you.

ETHEL.

Mother——!

[*They kiss affectionately and* ETHEL *hurries away.* ZOE *resumes her seat at the tea-table and pours out tea. Presently* LEONARD *returns and, after closing the door, comes to her.*

LEONARD.

[*Cheerfully.*] It's beginning to sleet now. 'Pon my soul——! [*She hands him a cup of tea in silence. He looks at her inquiringly.*] Anything wrong, Zoe?

ZOE.

[*With an air of indifference.*] No.

LEONARD.

Positive?

ZOE.

[*In the same tone, offering him a plate of bread-and-butter.*] Quite.

LEONARD.

[*Taking a slice.*] Thought there'd been another row, perhaps.

ZOE.

[*Putting the plate of bread-and-butter aside and taking up her cup and saucer.*] Hell of a row last night.

LEONARD.

Last night?

ZOE.

This morning, rather.

LEONARD.

When you came home?

ZOE.

[*Sipping her tea.*] After you and Peter brought me home.

LEONARD.

What over?

ZOE.

Nothing.

LEONARD.

[*Drinking.*] Must have been over something.

ZOE.

Oh, some trifle—as usual.

LEONARD.

Too bad of Theo—damned sight too bad.

ZOE.

I dare say it was as much my fault as his.

LEONARD.

[*Hotly.*] It's a cursed shame!

ZOE.

Drop it, Len. [*Handing him a dish of cakes.*] Cake?

LEONARD.

[*Putting his empty cup down before her and taking a cake.*] Ta.

ZOE.

[*Pouring out another cup of tea for him.*] First time you've drunk tea with me this week. Honoured!

LEONARD.

Sorry.

ZOE.

M'yes—[*giving him his tea*] sorry that Mrs. Pierpoint and Ethel can't receive you this afternoon.

LEONARD.

[*After a pause, uncomfortably.*] Mrs. Pierpoint been telling you anything about me?

ZOE.

Mentioned that you frequently turn up in Sloane Street at tea-time.

LEONARD.

There's a man down that way who's frightfully gone on my wheel.

ZOE.

[*Drinking.*] Indeed?

LEONARD.

My great difficulty, you know, is to get it on to the market.

ZOE.

India-rubber people opposing you, I expect.

LEONARD.

Tooth and nail.

ZOE.

[*Nibbling a cake.*] And the man who lives Sloane Street way——?

LEONARD.

Very influential chap.

ZOE.

Capitalist?

LEONARD.

Millionaire.

ZOE.

H'm! And when you're down Sloane Street way, do you take your flowers to Miss Pierpoint, or does your florist send them?

[*Again there is silence. He lays his cup down, leaves her side, and produces his cigarette-case. Sticking a cigarette between his lips, he is about to close the case when she rises and takes a cigarette from it. She moves to the fireplace, lighting her cigarette with a match from a box attached to a gold chatelaine hanging from her waist. He seats himself in the chair facing the fire and lights his own cigarette.*

LEONARD.

[*Moodily.*] I don't want to marry, Zoe.

ZOE.

There's no reason why you shouldn't, if you feel disposed to; but you needn't be a sneak about it.

LEONARD.

The aunt's pitching into me again like billy-oh. High time I settled down—high time I became a reputable member of society! I ask you, what the deuce have I ever done that's particularly disreputable? Then come two verses of Scripture——

ZOE.

[*Advancing to him.*] She hasn't ordered you to be underhanded with your best friends, I assume?

LEONARD.

I'm not underhanded.

ZOE.

Why this concealment, then?

LEONARD.

There's no concealment; there's nothing to conceal; I give you my word there isn't. I—I haven't made up my mind one way or the other.

ZOE.

[*Witheringly.*] You're weighing the question!

LEONARD.

Very well; I'm weighing it, if you like. [*Flinging the end of his match into the fireplace and jumping up.*] Confound it all! Mayn't a man send a basket or two of rotten flowers to a girl without having his special license bought for him by meddling people?

ZOE.

Thank you.

LEONARD.

I don't mean you, Zoe. You know I don't mean you. [*Pacing the room.*] Ethel—Miss Pierpoint—is a charming girl, but I'm no more in love with her than I am with my old hat.

ZOE.

Then you oughtn't to pay her marked attention.

LEONARD.

I'm not paying her marked attention. [ZOE *shrugs her shoulders.*] If Mrs. Pierpoint says I've been making love to her daughter——

ZOE.

She has said nothing of the kind.

LEONARD.

[*Sitting in the chair before the writing-table, in a huff.*] That's all right. Pity she can't hold her tongue over trifles.

[*There is another pause. Then, partly kneeling upon the chair in the middle of the room, and resting her elbow on the back of it,* ZOE *softens.*

ZOE.

[*Making rings with her cigarette smoke.*] Don't be wild, Len. I was only vexed with you for not consulting me. It would hurt my feelings dreadfully if you got engaged to anybody on the sly. Len—[*He turns to her, but with his head down.*] She *is* a charming girl. I'm not surprised at your being spoons on her. If I were a man, she's just the sort of girl *I'd* marry, if I were on the look-out for a wife.

LEONARD.

[*In a low voice.*] Perhaps I *have* made myself a bit of an ass over her, Zoe. [*She laughs lightly. He raises his eyes.*] Zoe——

ZOE.

Well?

LEONARD.

[*Gazing at* ZOE.] Do you know that she reminds me very often of you?

ZOE.

She! I'm old enough to be her grandmother.

LEONARD.

Oh, hang that! She's got hold of a lot of your odd little tricks—a lot of 'em.

ZOE.

She's been with me a goodish deal lately.

LEONARD.

That's it; and she has the most enormous admiration for you—enormous.

ZOE.

She's a dear.

LEONARD.

[*Gently hitting his knee with his fist.*] I've thought of all that when I've been worrying it out in my mind.

ZOE.

Thought of all what?

LEONARD.

That you'd always be pals, you two—close pals.

ZOE.

If she became Mrs. Lenny?

LEONARD.

[*Nodding.*] And so, if I did screw myself up to—to speaking to her, it wouldn't make the least difference to our friendship—yours and mine.

ZOE.

No difference!

LEONARD.

I should still be your tame robin.

ZOE.

Ah, no; don't make that mistake, Len.

LEONARD.

Mistake?

ZOE.

[*Shaking her head.*] It never works. I've seen similar cases over and over again. There's any amount of gush at the start, between the young wife and the husband's women-pals; but the end is always the same.

LEONARD.

The end?

ZOE.

Gradually the wife draws the husband away. She manages it somehow. We have a gift for it. I did it myself when I married Theo.

LEONARD.

[*Rising and walking about.*] If I believed what you say, Zoe, I'd never size-up a girl with a view to marrying as long as I live.

ZOE.

[*Teasingly.*] You're a vain creature. I've plenty of other boys, Len, to fill your place.

LEONARD.

[*Not heeding her.*] If things were smoother with you and Theo, one mightn't hesitate half as much.

ZOE.

There's Peter Mottram, Gus Hedmont, Harry Estridge, Claud Lowenstein——

LEONARD.

As it is—Great Scot!—I'm a brute even to think of taking the risk.

ZOE.

Cossy Rawlings, Jim Mallandain, Robby Relf——

LEONARD.

[*Stopping in his walk.*] Yes, but my friendship's more to you than the friendship of most of those other fellows, I should hope.

ZOE.

[*Making a grimace at him.*] Not a scrap.

LEONARD.

[*His brow darkening.*] You told me once I was your favourite.

ZOE.

My chaff; I've no favourite.

LEONARD.

[*Laying the remains of his cigarette upon a little bronze tray on the writing-table.*] Peter's a trump, and Harry Estridge and Rawlings are sound enough; but I often feel I'd like to knock young Lowenstein's teeth down his fat throat.

ZOE.

[*Blowing her smoke in his direction as he comes to her and stands before her.*] You get married and mind your own concerns.

LEONARD.

Zoe, I hate to see men of that class buzzing round you.

ZOE.

[*Mockingly.*] Do you!

LEONARD.

Look here! Whatever happens between you and Theo in the future, you'll never let anything or anybody drive you off the rails, will you?

ZOE.

[*Frowning.*] Len!

LEONARD.

I couldn't stand it; [*putting his hands upon her shoulders.*] I tell you straight, it 'ud break me. [*Passionately, his grip tightening.*] Zoe——!

[*She shakes herself free and backs away from him, confronting him with a flushed face.*

ZOE.

[*Quietly.*] Don't be silly. [*Brushing her hair from her forehead.*] If ever you do that again, Len, I'll box your ears.

[*The* HONBLE. PETER MOTTRAM, *a spruce, well-preserved man of fifty, enters at the glazed door.*

PETER.

[*Cheerily.*] Good mornin'—or whatever it is.

ZOE.

[*Dropping the end of her cigarette into the grate.*] That you, Peter?

LEONARD.

[*Surlily.*] I'm just off.

PETER.

Don't apologize.

LEONARD.

[*At the glazed door, to* PETER.] See you later.

[*He goes out.*

PETER.

[*To* ZOE.] What's the matter with the youth?

ZOE.

[*With a shrug.*] Got the hump over something. [*Facing him.*] Tea?

PETER.

No, thanks. [*Sitting in the chair in the middle of the room.*] And how are you to-day, my dear lady? [*She makes a wry mouth, sighs, and throws herself disconsolately upon the settee by the fire. He nods intelligently.*] Yes, sorry to hear you and old Theo have had another bad fall-out.

ZOE.

[*Arranging a pillow for her head.*] I guessed he'd carry it all to you.

PETER.

Shockin'ly grieved, I am.

ZOE.

He began this one.

PETER.

By blowin' you up for goin' on the frisk every night.

ZOE.

And I answered him back. I was dogweary. It was nearly one o'clock. He needn't have jumped upon me almost before I'd taken the key out of the lock.

PETER.

[*Demurely.*] I also have been reproved, for aidin' and abettin'.

ZOE.

Serves you jolly well right. Why didn't you and Lenny come in with me, you cowards? That might have saved a squabble. I begged you to have a whiskey.

PETER.

[*After a brief pause.*] Zoe——

ZOE.

[*In a muffled voice, her head in the pillow.*] Oh, be kind to me, Peter.

PETER.

Why *do* you sally forth night after night?

ZOE.

Because I must.

PETER.

Must?

ZOE.

I've got the fidgets.

PETER.

I get the fidgets at times, in bed. D'ye know how I cure 'em?

ZOE.

Of course I don't.

PETER.

I lie perfectly stiff and still; I *make* myself lie perfectly still. I *won't* stir. I say to myself, "Peter, you *sha'n't* twist or turn." And I win.

ZOE.

How easy it is to talk! I defy you to control yourself if you're shut up with a person who goads you to desperation.

PETER.

Theo?

ZOE.

[*Beating her pillow.*] How *can* I stay at home and eat a long dinner, and spend an entire evening, alone with Theo? We're not entertaining just now; he says he's fed up with having people here.

PETER.

Take him out with you.

ZOE.

Then we quarrel before others. That's too degrading. Oh, it's tiff, tiff, wrangle, jangle, outdoors *and* indoors with us!

PETER.

You say things to Theo when you're angry, Zoe, that wound him to the quick.

ZOE.

[*Satirically.*] Really!

PETER.

Really. You mayn't be aware of it; you scratch the poor old chap till he bleeds.

ZOE.

Do you imagine he never says things to me that wound me to the quick?

PETER.

He doesn't mean half of 'em.

ZOE.

Neither do I.

PETER.

[*Rising and going to the fire.*] No; there's the crass foolishness of it all. [*In a tone of expostulation.*] My dear lady——

ZOE.

[*Suddenly sitting upright.*] We're on each other's nerves, Peter. That's the plain truth, we're on each other's nerves.

PETER.

Worryin' each other.

ZOE.

Sick to death of each other! We shall have been married fourteen years on the thirtieth of next June. Isn't it appalling! He's getting so stodgy and pompous and flat-footed. He drives me mad with his elderly ways.

PETER.

[*Soothingly.*] Oh——!

ZOE

He's sick and tired of *me,* at any rate. My little jokes and pranks, that used to amuse him so—they annoy him now, scandalize him. He's continually finding fault with me—bullying me. That's all the notice he takes of me. As for my gowns or my hats—anything I put on—I might dress

in sackcloth; he'd never observe it. [*Tearfully.*] Ah——! [*She searches for her handkerchief and fails to find it.* PETER *produces a folded handkerchief from his breast-pocket, shakes it out, and gives it to her. She wipes her eyes as she proceeds.*] Sometimes, I own, I'm aggravating; but he forgets how useful I was to him in the old days, when we were climbing. Yes, *those* were the days—the first six or seven years of our marriage, when we were up north, in Fitzjohn's Avenue! [*Tossing* PETER'S *handkerchief to him and getting to her feet.*] Oh! Oh, we were happy then, Peter! You didn't know us then, when we were up north!

PETER.

[*Wagging his head.*] My dear lady, we were all happier when we were up north.

ZOE.

[*Giving him a look of surprise as she paces the room on the left.*] You!

PETER.

I mean, in a previous stage of our careers.

ZOE.

Ah, yes, yes.

PETER.

That's the lesson of life, Mrs. Zoe. We've all had our Fitzjohn's Avenue, in a sense. In other words, we've all been young and keen as mustard; with everythin' before us, instead of havin' most things behind us.

ZOE.

[*Leaning on the back of the chair before the writing-table.*] Oh, don't!

PETER.

[*Thoughtfully.*] D'ye know, I often wonder whether there's anythin' more depressin' than to see the row of trophies standin' on the sideboard?

ZOE.

[*Sitting at the writing-table and digging her fingers into her hair.*] Be quiet, Peter!

PETER.

That silver-gilt vase there! The old horse that gained it for you is lyin' in the paddock with a stone a'top of him, and you're usin' his hoof as an ink-pot. Those goblets you won on the river, and the cup you helped yourself to on the links at Biarritz or St. Moritz—there's a little pile of ashes at the bottom of every one of 'em! So it is with life generally. You scoop in the prizes—and there are the pots on the sideboard to remind you that it ain't the *prizes* that count, but the pushin' and the strugglin' and the cheerin'. Ah, they preach to us on Sundays about cherubim and seraphim! It's my firm hope and conviction that when we die and go to Heaven we shall all find ourselves up north again —in Fitzjohn's Avenue! [*Coming to the chair in the middle of the room.*] Meanwhile, it's no good repinin'. [*Turning the chair towards her and sitting.*] The trophies *are* on the sideboard, dear lady, and they've got to be kep' clean and shiny. [*Gravely.*] Now, Zoe—[*She whimpers.*] Zoe, Zoe—[*she turns to him.*] Zoe, one ugly word passed between you and Theo last night——

ZOE.

One——?

PETER.

One ugly word that must never be repeated.

ZOE

What word?

[*The glazed door opens and* WARREN *appears carrying a teapot on a tray. He comes to the table and exchanges the teapot he is carrying for the one that is already there.*

ZOE.

[*To the man.*] Mr. Mottram won't have any tea, Warren.

WARREN.

[*Removing the cups and saucers which have been used and putting them on to his tray.*] No, ma'am; but Mr. Blundell's just come in, ma'am.

[WARREN *withdraws, closing the door.* ZOE *rises stiffly, and gathers up her hat, coat, and gloves. Then she returns to* PETER, *who remains seated.*

ZOE.

What word was it?

PETER.

Separation.

[THEODORE BLUNDELL, *a big, burly, but good-looking man, enters at the glazed door. He halts on entering and glances furtively at* ZOE, *as if expecting her to speak; but, without meeting his eyes, she passes him and leaves the room.*

THEODORE.

[*With a shrug.*] Ha! [PETER, *looking over his shoulder, sees that he and* THEODORE *are alone.* THEODORE *seats himself at the tea-table and pours out his tea grimly.*] Lots o' good you seem to have done, Peter.

PETER.

Haven't done much, I admit. Pity you came home quite so soon.

THEODORE.

You left the office at half-past two.

PETER.

She wasn't in when I first got here.

THEODORE.

[*Taking a slice of bread-and-butter.*] Anyhow, kind of you to offer to have a talk to her. [*Munching.*] Plenty of abuse of me, h'm?

PETER.

She says you're on each other's nerves, Theo.

THEODORE.

I'm afraid there's something in that.

PETER.

And that you are growin' a bit heavy in hand, old man.

THEODORE.

[*Drily.*] Exceedingly sorry.

PETER.

[*After a pause.*] Theo——

THEODORE.

Hallo?

PETER.

Shall I tell you what's at the bottom of it all?

THEODORE.

Well?

PETER.

She's got a feelin' that you're tired of her.

THEODORE.

[*Gulping his tea.*] If you knew how constantly I have that served up to me——!

PETER.

Will you allow me to speak out?

THEODORE.

Don't be so polite.

PETER.

My belief is that, if you could avoid conveyin' that impression to Zoe, matters would improve considerably in this establishment.

THEODORE.

Oh?

PETER.

It's as easy as brushin' your hat. A little pettin'—little sweetheartin'——

THEODORE.

Yes?

PETER.

[*Discouraged.*] Well, those are my views, for what they're worth.

THEODORE.

[*Pouring out another cup of tea.*] My dear fellow, if you'd get married, and have thirteen or fourteen years of it, as I've had, your views would be worth more than they are.

PETER.

Oh, that won't wash. [*Rising.*] When a man's sufferin' from gout in the toe, he doesn't stipulate that his M.D. shall be writhin' from the same ailment. No, very frequently, the outsider——

THEODORE.

Good gracious, you're not going to remark that lookers-on see most of the game!

PETER.

Words to that effect.

THEODORE.

Ho! Why is it that, the moment a man's matrimonial affairs are in a tangle, every platitude in the language is chewed-out at him? [*Leaning his head on his hands.*] If you've nothing fresher to say on the subject——!

PETER.

[*Oracularly.*] My dear chap, it's tryin' to say somethin' fresh on the subject of marriage that's responsible for a large share of the domestic unhappiness and discontent existin' at the present day. There's too much of this tryin' to say somethin' fresh on *every* subject, in my opinion.

THEODORE.

Nobody can accuse *you,* Peter——

PETER.

You take it from me, there are two institootions in this world that are never goin' to alter—men and women and the shape of chickens' eggs. Chickens' eggs are never goin' to be laid square; and men and women will continue to be mere men and women till the last contango.[1] [THEODORE *finishes his tea, rises, and comes to the fire.*] I'm referrin', of course, to real men and women. I don't inclood persons in petticoats with flat chests and no hips; nor individuals wearin' beards and trousers who dine on a basin of farinaceous food and a drink o' water out o' the filter. They belong to a distinct species. No; I mean the genuine article, like you and me and your missus—men and women with blood in their veins, and one-and-a-half per cent. of good, humanizin' alcohol in *that.*

THEODORE.

[*Throwing a log on the fire.*] What's the moral of your eloquent, but rather vague, discourse?

PETER.

[*At the chair in the middle of the room.*] The moral? Oh, the moral is that men and women of the ordinary, regulation pattern must put up with the defects of each other's

[1] "*Contango-day*"—*a Stock Exchange expression: the day on which a buyer or seller "carries over" to the next settling-day.*

qualities. [*Turning the chair so that it faces* THEODORE *and again sitting in it.*] She complains that you don't admire her frocks and frills, Theo.

THEODORE.

[*Groaning.*] Oh!

PETER.

Now, come! Where's the trouble? There's my old mother—seventy-five in April! Whenever I'm at Stillwood, I make a reg'lar practice of complimentin' her on her rig-out. "By Jove, mater," I say, "you *are* a buck this mornin'!" Or evenin', as the case may be. I couldn't tell you what she's wearin', to save my life; but there's no harm done.

THEODORE.

Yes, *you* do it; but your father doesn't do it, I'll be bound. [PETER *looks glum and is silent.*] It's too trivial! [*Producing his cigar case.*] A husband can't be everlastingly praising his wife's clothes. [*Offering a cigar to* PETER *which he declines.*] The absence of comment on my part is a sign that I'm satisfied with Zoe's appearance, surely.

PETER.

She's one of the smartest women in London.

THEODORE.

[*Irritably.*] I know she is. I've told her so till I'm sick. [*Cutting and lighting a cigar.*] I've always been intensely proud of Zoe, as a matter of fact—intensely proud of her.

PETER.

No more than her due.

THEODORE.

[*With increasing indignation.*] Good God, how often, at a dinner-party, have I caught myself looking along the table and thinking she's the handsomest woman in the room! Tsch! It's a ridiculous thing to say——

PETER.

What?

THEODORE.

I suppose no man has ever been "in love" with his wife for longer than I've been with mine.

PETER.

[*Significantly.*] *Been.*

THEODORE.

And I have a very great affection for her still—or should have, if her behaviour didn't check it.

PETER.

If you showed your affection more plainly, wouldn't that check her behaviour?

THEODORE.

[*Leaving the fireplace and moving about the room.*] Oh, my dear fellow, haven't you brains enough to see! We're middle-aged people, Zoe and I. I *am* middle-aged, and she's not far off it, poor girl. There must come a time on a journey when your pair of horses stop prancing and settle down to a trot.

PETER.

How's that for a platitude!

THEODORE.

I thought that worm-eaten illustration might appeal to you.

PETER.

She keeps wonderfully young, Theo.

THEODORE.

Isn't that a little to my credit? But Zoe's within three years of forty. You can't put the clock back.

PETER.

A woman's as old as she looks——

THEODORE.

And a man's as old as he feels! Another ancient wheeze!

PETER.

And a *married* woman's as old as her husband *makes* her feel.

THEODORE.

My dear Peter, I don't want Zoe to feel older than her years by a single hour. But I confess I do ask her occasionally to feel as old *as* her years, and not to make herself damnably absurd.

PETER.

Absurd?

THEODORE.

This infernal fooling about with the boys, for instance—the cause of last night's flare-up—her "tame robins"—you're one——! [PETER *rises hastily and goes to the fire.*] Yes, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, for encouraging her.

PETER.

Who's in fault? Because a man's wife has ceased to be attractive to him, it doesn't follow that she ain't attractive to others.

THEODORE.

[*Contemptuously.*] *Attractive?* The vanity of "attracting" a parcel of empty-headed young men! You're the patriarch of the group! [*Throwing himself into the chair just vacated by* PETER.] The whole thing's undignified—raffish.

PETER.

[*Extending a forefinger.*] *You* contrive to be a trifle more sprightly at home, Theo——

THEODORE.

[*Moving his head from side to side.*] Oh, you will hammer away at that! I'm forty-six. My sprightly days are over.

PETER.

[*Emphatically.*] Humbug, old chap.

THEODORE.

What's humbug?

PETER.

Men are the biggest humbugs goin'—especially to themselves. And a man of your age or mine—and I'm four years your senior—is never a bigger humbug than when he's deloodin' himself with the notion that he's scrap-iron.

THEODORE.

You're a gay old spark——

PETER.

No, it's when the sun's working round to the west—it's when men are where we are now, that they're most liable to get into mischief.

THEODORE.

Mischief? What are you driving at?

PETER.

Nothin'. I'm simply layin' down a general principle.

THEODORE.

[*Angrily.*] Confound your general principles! Don't be an ass.

PETER.

[*Coming to* THEODORE.] That stoopid nonsense talked last night—early this mornin'—about livin' apart—who started it?

THEODORE.

Zoe. I fancy it was Zoe—last night.

PETER.

Oh, it wasn't the first time——?

THEODORE.

[*Smoking with fierce puffs.*] We had an awful scene—disgraceful. I felt inclined to rush out of the house then and there.

PETER.

Why didn't you? You could have let yourself in again when she'd gone to by-by.

THEODORE.

[*Sullenly.*] No, that's not my style. If ever I do bang the front-door, it'll be once and for all, my friend.

PETER.

[*Shaking him.*] Oh! Oh!

THEODORE.

She's independent; she has her own income—you know—and I've told her I'd supplement it, if necessary. I've settled this house on her as it is; she'd be welcome to it, and every stick in it, worst come to the worst.

PETER.

Theo——

THEODORE.

And I'd go and live in a garret, in peace.

PETER.

You're not considerin' such a step seriously?

THEODORE.

[*Turning upon him roughly.*] No, I'm not—not when I'm sitting here chatting quietly with you. Nor when she's rational and—and—and amenable, as she can be when she chooses. [*Clenching his hands.*] But when she's irritating me till I'm half beside myself, I—I——

PETER.

You——?

THEODORE.

[*Looking up at* PETER.] My God, Peter, you're a wise man, never to have taken it on!

PETER.

Marriage?

THEODORE.

[*Throwing his head back.*] Oh, my dear fellow!

[*The glazed door opens and* ZOE *enters meekly. Her eyes are red, and a handkerchief is crumpled up in her hand. She glances at the tea-table and comes to* THEODORE. PETER *retreats to the fireplace.*

ZOE.

[*To* THEODORE, *in a piteous voice.*] Have you—had your tea?

THEODORE.

[*Frigidly.*] I poured it out myself.

[*After a moment's hesitation, she bends over him and gives him a kiss. Then she turns away and, seating herself at the writing-table, proceeds to write a note. There is an awkward silence.*

THEODORE.

[*Breaking the silence, gruffly.*] Er—Zo——

ZOE.

[*With a sniff, writing.*] Yes?

THEODORE.

What are you doing to-night?

ZOE.

Jim Mallandain was going to take me to the Palace. I'm putting him off.

THEODORE.

I'll dine you out and take you somewhere.

ZOE.

No, I'd rather have a quiet evening at home, Theo—just you and me. [*Blowing her nose.*] I've ordered Mrs. Killick to send up an extra-nice dinner.

THEODORE.

Perhaps Peter——

ZOE.

[*Stamping her foot.*] No, I won't have him.

PETER.

Besides, I'm booked.

ZOE.

[*Petulantly.*] I don't care whether you are or not. I want to dine alone with my husband.

[*There is another pause, during which* ZOE *scratches away with her pen.*

PETER.

[*Clearing his throat.*] Well, I'll be gettin' along. [THEODORE *rises.*] I say——

THEODORE.

H'm?

PETER.

Why don't you and Zoe have a week or a fortnight in Paris? It 'ud do you both a heap of good.

THEODORE.

Impossible. How can I?

PETER.

Cert'nly you can. If anythin' important crops up, Tom Slade or I will run over to you; or you could come back. [*Again there is a pause.* ZOE *stops writing.*] Do, old chap. [*Another pause.*] Won't you?

THEODORE.

[*Without enthusiasm.*] All right.

PETER.

A fortnight? Nothin'll happen.

THEODORE.

[*Nodding.*] A fortnight.

[*Uttering a little chirp of delight,* ZOE *resumes writing.* PETER *goes to her as* THEODORE *moves away to the fireplace.*

PETER.

[*To* ZOE.] Good-bye, ma'am. [*She gives him her left hand over her shoulder. He squeezes it and makes for the glazed door. There he appears to be struck by an idea.*

After a silence he turns slowly, contemplates the pair for a moment with a puckered brow, and advances a step or two.] Theo——

THEODORE.

[*Who has picked up one of the illustrated papers and has seated himself upon the settee.*] H'm?

PETER.

[*His hands in his pockets, rattling his keys.*] About half-way between Dover and Calais—no, it's between Folkestone and Boulogne, ain't it?——

THEODORE.

[*Examining the pictures.*] What?

PETER.

Of course! About half-way between Folkestone and Boulogne—mid-Channel—there's a shoal.

THEODORE.

[*Turning a page of his paper.*] What of it?

PETER.

Le Colbart, the French sailor-men call it—Le Colbart. *We* call it the Ridge. [*Coming forward.*] If you go by Folkestone and Boulogne, you'll pass over it.

THEODORE.

[*Glancing at him suspiciously.*] Thanks for the valuable information.

PETER.

D'ye know, I've never encountered that blessed shoal without experiencin' a most unpleasant time?

ZOE.

[*Addressing an envelope.*] Oh, my dear Peter!

PETER.

I've crossed on some of the finest days o' the year. The sun's been shinin', and outside the harbour the water's been as smooth as it's been *in*side. Everythin's looked as enticin' as could be; but as we've neared the Ridge—mid-Channel—I've begun to feel fidgety, restless, out o' sorts—hatin' myself and hatin' the man who's been sharin' my cabin with me. But the sensation hasn't lasted long.

ZOE.

[*Sealing her letter.*] Glad to hear it.

PETER.

No; gradually the beastly motion has died down, and in a quarter-of-an-hour or so I've found myself pacin' the deck again, arm-in-arm with the travellin'-companion I've been positively loathin' a few minutes earlier.

THEODORE.

[*Gaping demonstratively.*] Very interesting.

PETER.

My dear pals, I remember the idea once occurrin' to me —I mentioned it to Charlie Westbrook at the time—there's a resemblance between *that* and marriage.

THEODORE.

[*Shortly.*] Ha! Thought that was coming.
[ZOE *turns in her chair, to listen to* PETER.

PETER.

Yes, and marriage, mark you, at its best and brightest. The happiest and luckiest of married couples have got to cross that wretched Ridge. However successful the first half of their journey may be, there's the rough-and-tumble of mid-Channel to negotiate. Some arrive there quicker than others, some later; it depends on wind and tide. But they *get* there; and a bad time it is, and must be—a time when travellin'-companions see nothin' but the spots on each others' yellow faces, and when innoomerable kind words and innoomerable kind acts are clean forgotten. [ZOE, *her letter in her hand, rises impulsively and comes to* PETER.] But, as I tell you, it's soon over—*well* over, if only Mr. Jack and Mrs. Jill will understand the situation; if only they'll say to themselves, "We're on the Ridge; we're in mid-Channel; in another quarter-of-an-hour the boat'll be steady again—as steady as when we stepped on to the gangway." [*To* THEODORE.] Not offended, old man?

THEODORE.

[*Uncomfortably.*] Ha, ha, ha!

ZOE.

[*Gently, giving her letter to* PETER.] Tell Warren to give that to a messenger-boy. [*To* THEODORE.] Theo——!
[*She puts her hands upon* PETER'S *shoulders and kisses him.*

PETER.

[*Chuckling.*] Ha, ha! [*To* THEODORE.] Division of profits. [*At the glazed door.*] When'll you be off?

THEODORE.

Oh—one day next week.

PETER.

[*Nodding.*] To-morrow mornin', then.

[*He goes out, closing the door.*

ZOE.

Dear old Peter!

THEODORE.

[*Deep in his paper.*] Peter's gettin' a bit of a bore, though.

ZOE.

[*Mimicking* PETER, *as she wipes her eyes.*] He's amusin'. [*Going to* THEODORE *and seating herself beside him.*] Theo——

THEODORE.

H'm?

ZOE.

[*Edging up to him.*] Let's go by Folkestone and Boulogne —shall we?

THEODORE.

I don't mind.

ZOE.

[*Wistfully.*] Let's go by Folkestone and Boulogne—and have done with it. [*Slipping her arm through his.*] Theo—last night—sorry. [*He nods and looks at another picture.*] I take it all back—the things I said. I didn't mean them.

THEODORE.

That's all right.

ZOE.

And *you* didn't mean——?

THEODORE.

[*Impatiently.*] Of course I didn't.

ZOE.

[*Giving herself a shake.*] Ah! [*After a brief pause.*] Theo——

THEODORE.

H'm?

ZOE.

[*Taking the paper from him playfully.*] Don't look at those improper young ladies. [*Coaxingly.*] Couldn't you manage to get away on Sunday?

THEODORE.

Oh—I might.

ZOE.

It's your treat to me, isn't it—and the beginning of better times? The *sooner* we begin——

THEODORE.

[*Nodding.*] You shall have it all your own way.

ZOE.

[*Gleefully.*] Sunday!

THEODORE.

H'm.

ZOE.

I'm dreadfully shabby. I've no new clothes. You don't object?

THEODORE.

[*Distinctly.*] Now, my dear Zo—my darling—understand this from me clearly. You are *never* shabby; you *couldn't* be shabby. As far as I am a judge, you are always dressed beautifully and—and—and in perfect taste.

ZOE.

Beautifully!

THEODORE.

If you were *not* well-dressed, I should venture to call your attention to it.

ZOE.

Silence is approval?

THEODORE.

Absolutely. So don't expect me—a busy man—to be eternally praising your gowns and what not; because I cannot and will not do it.

ZOE.

I won't—I won't. I know I'm inconsiderate—[*stamping her foot*] beastly inconsiderate. [*Excitedly.*] Write out a telegram now——

THEODORE.

Telegram?

ZOE.

To the hotel.

THEODORE.

Yes, that 'd be wise. [*He rises and goes over to the writing-table where, taking a sheet of note-paper, he sits and writes.*] We couldn't get an answer to a letter.

ZOE.

[*Jumping up and walking about.*] Jolly nice rooms, Theo!

THEODORE.

[*Assentingly.*] H'm, h'm.

ZOE.

[*Humming.*] Tra, la! ra, la! la, ra, la——!

THEODORE.

[*In the throes of composition.*] Sssh, sssh!

ZOE.

[*Opening the illustrated paper.*] Beg pardon.

THEODORE.

[*Writing.*] "——deux bonnes chambres à coucher—salle de bain—et salon——"

ZOE.

There's Lena. Don't forget the maid.

THEODORE.

Oh, they shove her anywhere.

ZOE.

[*Imperatively.*] No, no; I must have her handy. [*He writes.*] What hotel are we going to, Theo?

THEODORE.

[*Writing.*] "——aussi chambre pour servante même étage——"

ZOE.

The Ritz?

THEODORE.

Oh, blow the Ritz!

ZOE.

We've always *been* comfortable at the Ritz.

THEODORE.

[*Putting the finishing touches to his telegram.*] Twenty francs a minute.

ZOE.

[*Disappointed.*] Where then? The Elysée Palace is too far out this weather. The Régina?

THEODORE.

[*Reading.*] "Pouvez-vous réserver pour Monsieur et Madame Blundell pour dimanche et nuits suivantes apartement composé deux bonnes chambres à coucher, salle de bain, et salon, aussi chambre pour servante même étage? Réponse télégraphique. Theodorus, London."

ZOE.

[*Advancing.*] Oh, Theo! Shall we try the new Meurice? The Langdales had a suite there that made them feel like Royalties.

THEODORE.

[*Half-turning to her.*] Gerald Duckfield was telling me of a capital little hotel where he and Bessie stayed—the Vendôme——

ZOE.

Where's that?

THEODORE.

In the Place Vendôme.

ZOE.

The Ritz—the Bristol—the Rhin—they're the only hotels in the Place.

THEODORE.

Oh, but this is in the part of the Place that runs down to the top of the Rue Castiglione.

ZOE.

The *narrow* part?

THEODORE.

Well, it isn't the broad part, certainly.

ZOE.

The traffic of the Rue St. Honoré to help to send you to sleep!

THEODORE.

No, no; there are double windows, Gerald says, to the best bedrooms. [*Turning to the writing-table.*] It 'ud be an experiment.

ZOE.

[*Sitting in the chair in the middle of the room, with her back to him.*] Yes, it would be an experiment.

THEODORE.

Shall we risk it?

ZOE.

[*Coldly.*] By all means.

THEODORE.

[*Writing.*] "Directeur—Hôtel Vendôme——"

ZOE.

[*Tapping her feet upon the floor.*] Ha!

THEODORE.

H'm? "——Place Vendôme——"

ZOE.

[*Holding up the illustrated paper so that he may see, over her head, a* risqué *picture.*] If you were taking this sort of woman with you, nothing 'ud be good enough for her.

THEODORE.

[*Glancing at the picture, angrily.*] Oh, don't be so coarse! [*There is a pause. He leans back in his chair, biting his pen. Suddenly she flings the illustrated paper away from her into the air. Throwing down his pen, he rises and paces the room.*] This promises well for an enjoyable fortnight in Paris!

ZOE.

[*Rising and moving to the left.*] Look here, old man! This trip was going to be *your* treat. Very well, that's off! I'll take *you* to Paris; *I'll* pay the expenses; and I won't stuff you up in a frowsy rabbit-hutch.

THEODORE.

[*Coming forward on the right.*] Don't insult me!

ZOE.

[*Facing him.*] Anyway, your treat or mine, I stay at no hotel in Paris that isn't top-hole.

THEODORE.

[*Furiously.*] Oh, stop your damned slang, for God's sake!

ZOE.

[*Her eyes blazing.*] What!

THEODORE.

[*Sitting on the fauteuil-stool and rocking himself to and fro.*] Oh! Oh!

ZOE.

Stop my damned slang!

THEODORE.

[*His head in his hands.*] Hold your tongue!

ZOE.

[*Coming to him.*] And how did I learn my damned slang, pray? [*He waves her from him.*] I learnt it from the crew you surrounded me with when I condescended to marry you and went out of my world into yours.

THEODORE.

[*Starting up.*] Oh——!

[*He goes to the bell and rings it continuously.*

ZOE.

[*Following him.*] Yes, you were hugely tickled by it *then*! And so were *they*—the men you thought might be serviceable to you; and who *were* serviceable to you, often through *me*!

THEODORE.

Oh!

ZOE.

Ha! And now that my tongue's furred with it, and it isn't necessary to attract the vulgar brutes any more, you round on me and rag me! [*Pacing the room on the left.*] Oh! Oh! If only my dear old dad were alive! He'd fuss over me and protect me. My father was a gentleman. He warned me I was chucking myself away!

THEODORE.

Oh!

ZOE.

[*Wildly.*] Why do you keep on ringing that bell?

THEODORE.

[*In a loud vice.*] I suppose I can ring the bell if I like!

ZOE.

You—you can go to the devil if you like!

[*She goes out at the glazed door. As she disappears,* WARREN *passes her and enters.*

THEODORE.

[*Crossing to the writing-table.*] Warren——

WARREN.

Yessir?

THEODORE.

[*Picking up the sheet of paper on which he has written the message to the hotel.*] Pack me a bag.

WARREN.

Bag, sir?

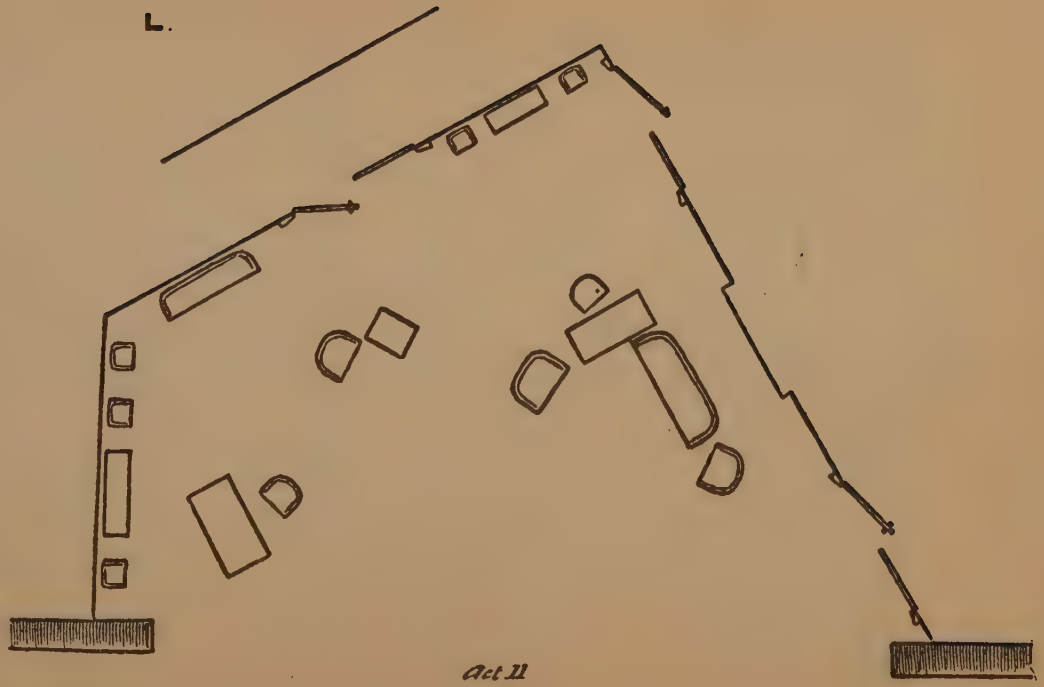
THEODORE.

[*Tearing the paper into small pieces.*] Yes; I'm not sleeping at home to-night.

WARREN.

[*Coming to the table and preparing to remove the tea-things.*] Very good, sir.

END OF THE FIRST ACT



Act II

THE SECOND ACT

The scene is the same, but the disposition of some of the furniture is changed. The settee on the right is now placed with its back to the fireplace. At the further end of the settee are the oblong table and chair, and on the left of the table, facing the settee, is the chair which in the preceding act stood in the middle of the room. An arm-chair is at the nearer end of the settee, and another arm-chair and the fauteuil-stool stand together not far from the glazed door.

On the oblong table are a box of cigarettes, matches, and an ash-tray.

The fireplace is banked with flowers, there are flowers in vases upon the tables, and the room is full of sunlight.

[*Two men—an upholsterer and his assistant—are engaged in putting covers of gay chintz upon the chairs and settees. The upholsterer is on his knees at the settee on the right, the assistant is at the chair by the writing-table.* LENA, ZOE'S *maid—a bright, buxom woman—is arranging the furniture in the middle of the room. Presently the assistant proceeds to collect the brown paper and cord which litter the floor.*

UPHOLSTERER.

[*Rising from his knees—to* LENA.] That's all right.

LENA.

[*Coming to him.*] And when are we to have the pleasure of seeing *you* again?

UPHOLSTERER.

Tomorrow.

LENA.

What about next year, or the year after! [*Producing her purse and giving him a tip.*] In case I shouldn't live so long.

UPHOLSTERER.

Thank you very much. [*Moving away — quietly.*] William——

[*The assistant, laden with brown paper, advances, and* LENA *tips him.*

ASSISTANT.

Thank you, miss. Good morning, miss.

LENA.

Good morning.

UPHOLSTERER.

[*At the glazed door.*] Good morning.

LENA.

[*Tidying the furniture on the right.*] Good morning.

[*The men depart. Almost immediately, the glazed door is reopened and* WARREN *appears, showing in* LEONARD. LEONARD *is gloved and is carrying a straw hat and a walking-cane. He has lost his fresh, boyish appearance and is sallow and lined.*

LEONARD.

[*To* LENA.] Good morning.

LENA.

[*Familiarly.*] Oh, good morning. [*To* WARREN.] I'll let Mrs. Blundell know. [*To* LEONARD, *as* WARREN *withdraws.*] She'll be down soon. Will you have a paper?

LEONARD.

Thanks; seen 'em. How is she, Lena?

LENA.

Middling. She's a little feverish, the doctor says. She must have caught a chill coming over. [LEONARD *nods.*] She would sit on deck, talking to Mr. Mallandain. We met him by accident on the platform as we were leaving Paris.

LEONARD.

[*Nodding again.*] She's told me.

LENA.

She's to remain indoors again today and keep out of draughts. [*Looking at a watch which she wears on her wrist and at the clock on the mantelpiece.*] What do you say the right time is?

LEONARD.

[*Looking at his watch.*] Quarter to twelve.

LENA.

[*Going to the mantelpiece.*] I'm to give her her med'cine an hour before meals. [*Moving the hands of the clock.*] Ha! They've all been playing tricks here while we've been away, clock-winder included.

LEONARD.

[*Absently.*] Indeed?

LENA.

Servants, tradespeople, everybody! [*Unbuckling her bracelet.*] Because Mrs. Blundell is now on her own, I s'pose they fancy they can take advantage of her. [*Returning to* LEONARD.] I'll teach 'em! [*"Timing" her watch.*] Think we're getting fairly straight?

LEONARD.

[*Glancing idly at the room as he sits in the arm-chair near the glazed door.*] Wonderfully.

LENA.

Not bad, is it, considering we've been home only two days?

LEONARD.

[*Placing his hat and cane upon the fauteuil-stool.*] Capital.

LENA.

[*Refastening her bracelet.*] Ouf! The relief, after some of those foreign hotels!

LEONARD.

[*Drawing off his gloves.*] Tired of travelling, eh?

LENA.

Don't ask me! I was saying to Mrs. Killick at breakfast —I've had enough of Italy to last me my life. Over four months of it, and without a courier! [*Going towards the glazed door.*] That's a bit too stiff.

LEONARD.

It is rather.

LENA.

[*Halting by him and dropping her voice slightly.*] Not that we wanted a courier when *you* came out to us. A splendid courier you were; I couldn't wish for a better.

LEONARD.

[*Uncomfortably.*] Ha, ha!

LENA.

[*Laughing.*] Do you remember our losing her hat-box at that wretched old Siena?

LEONARD.

Yes—yes.

LENA.

You woke 'm up there in grand style. Ha, ha! Your friend, the Italian policeman—the image in the feathers——!

LEONARD.

Ha, ha!

LENA.

You did give him a dressing! [*Sobering herself.*] Yes, those three or four weeks you were with us were the pleasantest o' the lot, to my idea. [*Going.*] Well, good-day. [*Stopping again.*] Oh, but I must show you this. [*Taking a ring from her finger.*] A present from her—last Saturday —one of the best shops in the Roo Royarl. [*Handing it to him.*] She went out and bought it herself.

LEONARD.

Turquoise——

LENA.

And diamonds.

LEONARD.

[*Returning the ring.*] Beautiful.

LENA.

Wasn't it kind of her! I'm as vain as a peacock. [*Replacing the ring on her finger.*] But there, you've both been extremely good to me.

LEONARD.

Not at all.

LENA.

You have; you've spoilt me completely. [*At the door, speaking louder.*] Treacherous weather for June, isn't it?

LEONARD.

Very.

LENA.

[*In the corridor.*] Oh, here you are! Here's Mr. Ferris —I was just coming up to tell you——

[LEONARD *rises as* ZOE *appears in the corridor. She is dressed in an elegant robe of rich, soft material and carries a little bag in which are a few opened letters, her handkerchief, etc. She also is changed. Her face is wan and there are dark circles round her eyes.*

ZOE.

Ah? [*To* LEONARD, *formally, as she enters the room.*] Good morning.

LEONARD.

Good morning.

ZOE.

Lena, how charming the old chintz looks!

LENA.

[*Who is lingering.*] It's English!

ZOE.

[*Laying her bag upon the oblong table.*] If we could all be freshened up by the same process!

LENA.

[*Her hand on the door-handle.*] Don't forget you're to take your med'cine in three-quarters-of-an-hour.

ZOE.

Oh, bring me the filthy stuff when you like.

LENA.

[*In the corridor, closing the door.*] Now, don't be naughty.

[*As the woman disappears,* LEONARD *walks over to* ZOE. *She puts out her hand to check him, and they stand for a moment or two watching the door and listening. Then she drops her hand and turns her face to him perfunctorily, and he kisses her as a matter of course.*

ZOE.

Your motor isn't outside?

LEONARD.

No; I walked across the Park.

ZOE.

That yellow car of yours is so conspicuous. [*Arranging a pillow on the settee.*] Sorry I wasn't visible yesterday.

LEONARD.

You're better?

ZOE.

[*Evasively.*] Oh, more or less decrepit. [*Sitting.*] What have you been doing with yourself?

LEONARD.

Nothing much. [*Sitting in the arm-chair opposite to her.*] Except——

ZOE.

[*Taking her bag from the table.*] By-the-bye, I've had a note this morning from an old friend of yours.

LEONARD.

Who?

ZOE.

[*Producing a letter from the bag.*] Ethel Pierpoint.

LEONARD.

[*Inexpressively.*] Oh? [*She extracts the letter from its envelope and tosses it across to him. He reads it silently, with a frown. She takes a cigarette from the box on the table.*] I thought you'd dropped her.

ZOE.

I did, in a fashion. I stopped her letters by ceasing to answer them. [*Striking a match.*] I hated calling myself hers affectionately, knowing I'd been the cause of your slacking away from her.

LEONARD.

[*Under his breath.*] Pish!

ZOE.

[*Lighting her cigarette.*] *What* does she say?

LEONARD.

[*Reading aloud.*] "Dearest Zoe. Quite by chance I hear you are back at Lancaster Gate. Why do you still make no sign? I never wanted your friendship more than now—or the friendship of somebody who will give me good advice, or a sound shaking for being a fool. Please take pity on your troubled but ever devoted, Ethel Drayson Pierpoint." [*To* ZOE.] What does she mean by never wanting your friendship more than now? [ZOE *shakes her head. He continues to ponder over the letter.*] "—or the friendship of somebody who will give me good advice, or a sound shaking for being a fool."

ZOE.

[*Smoking, thoughtfully.*] When did you see the Pierpoints last?

LEONARD.

About a month after you left London—just before I followed you. [*Returning the letter to her.*] I cooled off them gradually.

ZOE.

[*After a pause.*] She's a nice girl—Ethel.

LEONARD.

Ye—es, she was nice enough.

[*There is a further pause. Then* ZOE *jumps up, as if to dismiss disagreeable reflections, and crosses to the writing-table. There she empties her bag of the letters it contains.*

LEONARD.

[*Gloomily.*] Am I in the way?

ZOE.

[*Fretfully.*] Of course not. [*She sits at the writing-table and busies herself with re-reading her letters and destroying some of them.* LEONARD *rises and takes a cigarette from the box.*] Poor Robby Relf has got neuritis.

LEONARD.

[*Lighting his cigarette.*] Zo——

ZOE.

Eh?

LEONARD.

I was going to tell you—I dined at the Carlton last night.

ZOE.

[*Indifferently.*] Oh?

LEONARD.

With Cossy Rawlings. Guess who was there.

ZOE.

[*Becoming attentive.*] Dun'no.

LEONARD.

He didn't see me—he was at a table the other side of the room——

ZOE.

[*Holding her breath.*] Theodore?

LEONARD.

Yes.

[*She throws the pieces of a letter into the waste-paper basket and leans back in her chair.*

ZOE.

How—how did he look?

LEONARD.

[*Curling his lip.*] I didn't study his appearance.

ZOE.

He—he wasn't—by himself?

LEONARD.

Hardly!

ZOE.

That—that woman?

LEONARD.

[*Nodding.*] Same lady.

ZOE.

Simply the two?

LEONARD.

[*Sitting upon the settee on the right.*] The two turtle doves.

[*After a brief silence, she pushes her letters from her, rises, and moves about the room quietly but agitatedly.*

ZOE.

Who is this creature?

LEONARD.

[*Impatiently.*] I've told you—and Jim told you on Sunday.

ZOE.

Hatherly—Annerly——?

LEONARD.

Her husband was a Major Annerly—Frank Annerly. He divorced her over a man of the name of Bettison.

ZOE.

Where's *he*?

LEONARD.

He's dead. She's been through a good many hands since.

ZOE.

Ho!

LEONARD.

Fred Wishart was one—and Tod Arnold——

ZOE.

She's quite young, isn't she?

LEONARD.

Looks a baby.

ZOE.

Ha!

LEONARD.

I should put her at thirty.

ZOE.

Pretty? They all are!

LEONARD.

Passable.

ZOE.

[*Behind the chair on the left of the oblong table.*] Do you think she's—with him?

LEONARD.

Not regularly. She's still living in Egerton Crescent, according to Cossy.

ZOE.

[*Gripping the back of the chair.*] She'll ruin him; she'll ruin him, Len.

LEONARD.

Oh, I dare say there'll be a bit left, when she's done with him.

ZOE.

There are other ways of dragging a man down besides through his pocket. Jim Mallandain says she's a vampire.

LEONARD.

Why should you worry yourself——?

ZOE.

I don't want him to come to grief. Why should I?

LEONARD.

If he does, you've nothing to reproach yourself with.

ZOE.

[*Giving him a swift look!*] *What!*

LEONARD.

[*Sullenly.*] Oh, you know what I mean—nothing that occurred before he took himself off.

ZOE.

[*Moving to the oblong table, with a long-drawn sigh.*] Ah-h-h! [*Sitting, her elbows on the table, leaning her head on her hand.*] It will always be on my conscience that I drove him away.

LEONARD.

You didn't drive him away.

ZOE.

I did.

LEONARD.

You were quite justified in doing it, anyhow. He made your life a burden to you.

ZOE.

I might have been more patient with him; I might have waited.

LEONARD.

Waited?

ZOE.

Waited till we'd got through the middle period of our lives. [*Raising her head.*] Peter warned us, the very day we parted——

LEONARD.

[*Sneeringly.*] Peter!

ZOE.

Mid-Channel! We should soon have reached the other side.

LEONARD.

There's a limit to human endurance; you'd passed it.

ZOE.

[*Staring before her.*] It seems to me now, there wasn't so very much for me to put up with—not so very much. [*Rising and walking to the back of the settee on which* LEONARD *is sitting.*] There was a lot of good in him, really. After all, he only needed managing, humouring——

LEONARD.

[*Starting up and turning to her.*] Upon my soul, Zoe! Ha! You're discovering no end of fine qualities in him suddenly!

ZOE.

[*Bitterly.*] Am I!

LEONARD.

You hadn't a decent word for him when we were in Italy! Now he's perfect!

ZOE.

[*Facing him.*] No, he's not.

LEONARD.

[*Satirically.*] Sounds like it.

ZOE.

[*Flaring up.*] Neither he nor you! You can be just as unkind to me as he ever was.

LEONARD.

[*Angrily.*] I!

ZOE.

Yes! And, with all his faults, he did try to take care of me—to keep me from harm! [*Her eyes ablaze.*] My God, what have *you* done!

[*They remain confronting one another for a moment without speaking. Then he turns away abruptly and picks up his hat and cane. She runs after him and clings to him.*

ZOE.

No, no; don't be hasty. I didn't mean it—I didn't mean it——

LEONARD.

[*Endeavouring to free himself.*] Let me go——

ZOE.

Ah, no! I'm not well to-day——

LEONARD.

I'll come back when you're better tempered.

ZOE.

I *am* better tempered. Look! it's all over. [*Coaxing him to give up his hat and cane.*] Lenny—Lenny dear—Lenny —[*Placing the hat and cane upon the writing-table, she takes her handkerchief from her bag and dries her eyes. He sits in the arm-chair near the glazed door sulkily.*] Ha, ha! Now you're beginning to see what sort of a time poor Theo had with me.

LEONARD.

Oh, can't you leave off talking about him for a single second!

ZOE.

[*Coming to him meekly.*] I beg your pardon, dear.

LEONARD.

You've got that fellow on the brain.

ZOE.

[*Standing behind him.*] You started it, by telling me of last night.

LEONARD.

Why the deuce *shouldn't* I tell you of last night! Do sit down. [*She sits near him, upon the fauteuil-stool.*] I can't make you out, Zo. This woman's only what we've been waiting for. I've said all along he'd soon give you an opportunity of divorcing him. She completes your case for you.

ZOE.

[*Dully.*] Yes.

LEONARD.

[*Grumbling.*] You ought to be tremendously obliged to Jim for being the first to open your eyes—my eyes too—to what's going on. Instead of which, you're upset by it. And now, because *I've* seen Blundell and the lady together, I'm favoured by hearing Mr. B. described as a model husband——

ZOE.

[*To silence him.*] Ah—!

LEONARD.

[*Changing his tone.*] When do you interview your lawyers?

ZOE.

I—I haven't written to them yet.

LEONARD.

You were to do it after I left you on Monday.

ZOE.

I—I've been feeling so cheap, Len.

LEONARD.

[*With a short laugh.*] We shall be grey-haired before we're married, at this rate. [*She lays her hand on his appeasingly. He retains her hand.*] I believe you'll have to go through the form of trying to compel Blundell to return

to you. Of course, he'll refuse. Meanwhile we must have the lady's house watched—or Blundell's flat. I shouldn't be surprised if he'd arrange that part of the business with you, to save trouble and expense. Drop a line to Maxwells to-day, will you?

ZOE.

[*Obediently.*] Yes.

LEONARD.

Or ring them up. You'll be able to get out to-morrow—or one of them would wait on you.

ZOE.

Yes.

LEONARD.

That's right, old girlie. Kiss me. [*They kiss quickly and cautiously, without ardour.*] Sorry.

ZOE.

[*Turning to him and lowering her voice almost to a whisper.*] Lenny——

LEONARD.

What?

ZOE.

Don't forget—Perugia.

LEONARD.

[*In an outburst.*] Oh, yes—curse the place!—let's forget Perugia. I was off my head there. I behaved like a blackguard. You needn't be continually throwing it in my teeth.

ZOE.

No, no; I'm not scolding you again. [*Gently.*] What I mean is—your breaking your word to me at Perugia—staying in the same hotel——

LEONARD.

Well?

ZOE.

If Theodore's solicitors got hold of that——

LEONARD.

[*Rising and walking away.*] Yes, but they won't get hold of it.

ZOE.

[*Twisting herself round towards him.*] You remember our meeting Claud Lowenstein at the railway station at Arezzo?

LEONARD.

I explained to him that my being in the train with you was pure chance. I made that square.

ZOE.

He was going to Perugia—to the Brufani. [*Rising.*] He may have been suspicious—he may have inquired——

LEONARD.

Even that little swine wouldn't tell tales.

ZOE.

[*Coming to him.*] Then there's Lena—they might pump Lena——

LEONARD.

My dear girl, all this would be very terrible if Blundell wasn't as anxious to get rid of you as we are to get rid of him. No, you take my word for it—he won't defend. His game is to be free at any price.

ZOE.

To marry again perhaps!

LEONARD.

Probably.

ZOE.

[*Clenching her hands.*] Ah, no!

LEONARD.

[*His brow darkening again.*] Doesn't *that* please you? There's no satisfying you, Zoe. [*She leaves him and paces the room distractedly.*] A minute ago you were frightened lest he should be ruined by Mrs. Annerly!

ZOE.

[*On the left.*] I—I couldn't bear the idea of another woman being a better wife to him than I was! I couldn't bear it, Lenny!

LEONARD.

Why, what concern would it be of yours——!

[*With a gesture, as the glazed door opens.*] Sssh!

[WARREN *appears.*

WARREN.

[*To* ZOE.] I beg your pardon, ma'am—Mr. Mottram.

ZOE.

[*Uttering a little, eager cry.*] Ah!

WARREN.

He'll call again, ma'am, if you're engaged.

ZOE.

Did you say I—I'd anybody with me?

WARREN.

No, ma'am.

ZOE.

[*After a slight pause—indicating the adjoining room.*] Is that room still covered up?

WARREN.

Yes, ma'am.

ZOE.

Well—show him in there for the moment.

WARREN.

Yes, ma'am.

[*He withdraws, closing the door.*

ZOE.

[*To* LEONARD, *in a low voice.*] He'd better not find you here so early.

LEONARD.

[*Also dropping his voice, testily.*] Why need you bother yourself with old Peter this morning?

ZOE.

[*Bringing* LEONARD *his hat and cane.*] I haven't seen him since January. Don't look so cross. [*Caressing his cheek.*] Are you engaged to lunch anywhere?

LEONARD.

No.

ZOE.

Will you eat your lunch with me?

[*He nods. She takes a powder-puff from her bag and, looking into the hand-mirror, hurriedly removes the traces of her tears. While she is thus occupied,* LEONARD *listens at the nearer door on the right.*

LEONARD.

[*Leaving the door—in a whisper.*] He's there.

[WARREN *reappears.*

WARREN.

[*To* ZOE.] Mr. Mottram is in the next room, ma'am.

ZOE.

Thank you.

[WARREN *withdraws.*

ZOE.

[*To* LEONARD, *in a whisper, accompanying him to the glazed door.*] Go into the Park and sit under the trees. Blow a kiss for me to all the kiddies. [*She watches him disappear down the corridor. Then, having closed the glazed door, she opens the further door on the right.*] Peter!

PETER.

[*Out of sight.*] My dear lady!

ZOE.

[*Going into the next room.*] Why on earth have they put you into this dismal room! Come into the light. [*Returning with him, her arm tucked through his.*] Oh, my dear Peter—my dear Peter——!

PETER.

Ah, yes, yes, yes! A nice way to serve a pal!

ZOE.

[*Closing the door.*] How did you——?

PETER.

Jim Mallandain dropped in at the office this morning. [*They leave the door.*] He travelled with you from Paris on Sunday.

ZOE.

I collided with him at the Gare du Nord.

PETER.

And this is Wednesday!

ZOE.

[*Withdrawing her arm.*] I funked sending for you; that's a fact.

PETER.

Funked it?

ZOE.

[*With the air of a child in disgrace.*] Your letters to me have been awfully sweet, but I know you despise me for making a muck of things.

PETER.

[*Protestingly.*] Ah, Mrs. Zoe!

ZOE.

And I'm rather a sick rabbit, Peter. [*Turning away.*] A sick rabbit has only one desire—to hide in its burrow. [*Facing him.*] My heart bounded when you were announced, though.

PETER.

[*Following her.*] You don't look very fit. Seen a doctor?

ZOE.

I've let Lena call in Rashleigh, to humour her; [*sitting on the settee on the right*] and I've promised to swallow his pig-wash.

PETER.

What's he say?

ZOE.

Chill; but—[*raising her eyes to his*] between ourselves?——

PETER.

Honour.

ZOE.

[*With quivering lips.*] Life, dear old chum!

PETER.

[*Tenderly.*] Ain't much in it?

ZOE.

Dam little. [*Putting her hair back from her brow.*] Phew! Can't sleep, Peter.

PETER.

Oh, lor!

ZOE.

I tumble into bed at twelve—one—two. I get an hour's stupor, from sheer fatigue, and then I'm wide-awake—thinking! Then, dressing-gown and slippers and the cigarettes; and then it's to and fro, up and down—smoke—smoke—smoke—often till the servants start brushing the stairs. No game, eh?

PETER.

How long has this——?

ZOE.

It began at—[*checking herself*] oh, a devil of a while. [*With a shiver.*] But I'm worse now I've set foot again in this house.

PETER.

[*Eyeing her keenly.*] Ghosts? [*Avoiding his gaze, she stretches out her hand towards the cigarette box. He pushes the box beyond her reach. She makes a grimace. There is a pause.*] Zoe——

ZOE.

Well?

PETER.

[*Deliberately.*] Why shouldn't you pick up the pieces?

ZOE.

Pick up—the pieces?

PETER.

You and Theodore.

ZOE.

Oh—don't be—funny, Peter.

PETER.

I'm not funny; I'm as serious as the clown at the circus. [*Another pause.*] Write to him—or give me a message to take to him. *See* him.

[*She gets to her feet and attempts to pass* PETER. *He detains her and she sinks back among her pillows.*

ZOE.

Ha, ha! You ridiculous man! [*Faintly.*] Pick up the pieces! As if that were possible!

PETER.

Oh, the valuable family china is in a good many fragments, I admit. But there *are* the fragments, lyin' on the carpet. They can be collected, fitted together.

ZOE.

[*With a sudden gesture of entreaty.*] Ah, for God's sake, Peter——!

PETER.

Why, I'm suggestin' nothin' unusual.

ZOE.

[*Repeating her gesture.*] Sssh!

PETER.

Go into the homes of three-fifths of the married people you know—*I* know—and you'll find some imposin' specimens of porcelain that won't bear inspectin' very narrowly.

ZOE.

[*Waving the subject away.*] Sssh, sssh!

PETER.

Only yesterday afternoon I was callin' at a house in—never mind the district. I was wanderin' round the drawin'-room, lookin' at the *bric-à-brac,* and there, on a Louis

Quatorze console-table, were as handsome a pair of old Chinese jars—genuine Mings—as ever I've met with. Such a sooperb glaze they've got, such depth o' colour! They appear to be priceless, perfect, till you examine 'em closely; and then—! My dear Zoe, they're cracked; they've both had a nasty knock at some time or another; they're scarred shockin'ly with rivets and cement. And while I was sheddin' tears over 'em, in sailed madam, smilin' and holdin' out her hand to me—she'd been upstairs, rubbin' carmine on her lips——

ZOE.

[*In a murmur.*] You horror!

PETER.

How kind of me to call—and how wild Tom 'ud be at missin' me! To the casual observer, she's the happiest woman goin'; and Tom, who strolled in just as I was leavin', might be the most domesticated of husbands. You follow me? You grasp the poetic allegory? Those faulty old Mings are emblematic of the establishment they adorn. Mr. and Mrs. Tom fell out years ago; they turned against each other one fine day—in mid-Channel—and hadn't the sense to kiss and be friends on landin'; their lives are as damaged as those wounded crocks of theirs on the console-table. [*Persuasively.*] Well, but ain't it wiser to repair the broken china, rather than chuck the bits into the dust-bin? It's still showy and effective at a distance; and there are cases—rare, but they exist—where the mendin's been done so neatly that the flaws are almost imperceptible. [*Seating himself opposite* ZOE.] Zoe——

ZOE.

[*Almost inaudibly.*] Yes, Peter?

PETER.

[*Leaning forward.*] I believe yours is one of the cases—yours and Theodore's—where the mendin' would be exceptionally successful.

ZOE.

What do you—what do you mean?

PETER.

My dear, old Theo is as miserable over this affair as you are.

ZOE.

[*Attempting a disdainful smile.*] N-nonsense!

PETER.

Oh, no, it ain't nonsense.

ZOE.

W-what makes you think that?

PETER.

Between ourselves?

ZOE.

[*A note of eagerness in her voice.*] Honour.

PETER.

He shows it in all manner o' ways. Neglects his business —ain't much good at it when he doesn't—is losin' his grip —looks confoundedly ill—*is* ill. Altogether he's a different man from the man he was, even when matters were at boilin' point here.

ZOE.

[*Locking and unlocking her fingers.*] Does he ever—speak of me?

PETER.

Oh, lor', yes.

ZOE.

N-not kindly?

PETER.

Very. Very kindly.

ZOE.

[*After a silence, as if in pain.*] Oh——! [*She rises, passes him, and goes to the other side of the room where she moves from one piece of furniture to another aimlessly.*] W-what's he say about me?

PETER.

[*Not turning.*] Frets about you—wonders how you're gettin' along—wonders as to the state of your finances—can't bear the idea of your bein' in the least pinched—wants to help you.

ZOE.

He's extremely generous!

PETER.

Theo? Never was anythin' else.

ZOE.

[*Her eyes flashing.*] His own expenses must be pretty considerable just now, too!

PETER.

[*Pricking up his ears.*] Must they? [*With great artlessness.*] Why?

ZOE.

Oh, do you imagine I live with wool in my ears?

PETER.

[*Over his shoulder.*] Wool——?

ZOE.

This woman he's continually with! [PETER'S *face is still averted from* ZOE. *At this juncture his eyes open widely and his mouth shapes to a whistle.*] This—Mrs.—Mrs.—what's her name—Annerly! [*Pacing the room.*] A notorious woman—a woman without a shred of character—an any-man's-woman——!

PETER.

[*Settling his features and turning his chair towards* ZOE *—in a tone of expostulation.*] Oh!

ZOE.

A baby-faced thing—seven years younger than I am! Precisely the class of goods a man of Theo's age flies at!

PETER.

Oh—oh——!

ZOE.

They're rather costly articles, aren't they!

PETER.

My dear Mrs. Zoe——

ZOE.

Oh, don't you pretend to be so innocent, Peter! You know jolly well he's all over the place with her. They were at Hurlingham together Saturday week.

PETER.

[*Coolly.*] I dessay.

ZOE.

And they dine *tête-à-tête* at the Savoy, Ritz's, the Carlton——

PETER.

Who supplies the information?

ZOE.

They were at the Carlton last night.

PETER.

Who's told you *that*?

ZOE.

L——

[*She pulls herself up.*

PETER.

[*Curiously.*] Who?

ZOE.

[*Moistening her lips.*] Oh, I—I first heard of it all from Jim Mallandain. He was full of it on board the boat on Sunday.

PETER.

Was he! [*Rising lazily.*] A busy gentleman—Jim.

ZOE.

It was Jim who met them at Hurlingham—had tea with 'em.

PETER.

[*Curiously again.*] But it can't be Jim who's blabbed about last night.

ZOE.

Why?

PETER.

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*] He happened to mention this mornin' that he was with a party at Jules'.

ZOE.

[*Confused.*] N-no, it isn't from Jim I've got that. I—[*throwing herself into the arm-chair near the glazed door.*] Oh, but really it's a matter of supreme indifference to me, Peter, my dear boy, whom Theodore entertains at the Carlton, or whom he entertains at his flat——

PETER.

[*Coming to her.*] My dear Zoe——

ZOE.

[*Laughing heartily.*] Ha, ha, ha! His flat! I hear it's quite sumptuous. After his pathetic yearnings for peace and quiet in a garret, he sets up, within a month of our separat-

ing, in an enormous flat in Cavendish Square! I received that bit of news when I was in Florence. I—I was intensely amused. Oh, let him wallow in his precious flat——!

PETER.

[*Argumentatively.*] My dear lady——

ZOE.

[*Her hand to her brow, exhausted.*] Ah, drop it, Peter; drop it!

PETER.

I ask you—a liberal-minded person—what 'ud become of friendship as an institootion if men and women couldn't be pals without havin' the—the—what-d'ye-call-it—the tongue of scandal wagged at 'em? The world 'ud be intolerable. It ain't all marmalade as it is; but if a fellow can't take the fresh air in the company of a female at Hurlingham, or give her a bite o' food at a restaurant——

ZOE.

[*Her head against the back of her chair, her eyes closed.*] Ah, la, la, la!

PETER.

As for this—er—this Mrs. Annerly——

[*He again purses his mouth and is evidently in a difficulty.*

ZOE.

[*Her eyes still shut.*] Well?

PETER.

It's true she chucked Annerly for another chap. I don't condone an act of that description—except that I knew Annerly, and if ever there was a dull dog——

ZOE.

Was he duller than Theo?

PETER.

Oh, go on with yer! And since then she's been a trifle—flighty—perhaps, now and again; [*with a gulp*] but to-day she might be your maiden aunt.

ZOE.

[*Dreamily.*] You humbug, Peter!

PETER.

[*Sitting beside her, upon the fauteuil stool.*] Oh, I'm not maintainin' that we men always select our women pals from the right basket. I'm not sayin' that we don't make asses of ourselves occasionally, sometimes from sentiment, sometimes from vanity, sometimes from—various causes. But the same remark applies to you women over your men-pals. [*Laying a hand on her arm.*] For instance—[*she opens her eyes*] for instance, here you are, throwin' stones at old Theo with regard to Alice Annerly. [*Significantly.*] My dear, there are a few panes o' glass in the house *you* live in, bear in mind.

[*She sits upright, looking at him.*

ZOE.

In the house—I——?

PETER.

[*Gravely.*] Mrs. Zoe, what you did when you were under your husband's protection is one thing; what you do now is another bag o' nuts entirely. And a woman situated as you are ought to be careful of retainin' a cub among her intimates.

ZOE.

A cub?

PETER.

Cub.

ZOE.

[*Apprehensively.*] To whom—are you alluding?

PETER.

Lenny Ferris.

ZOE.

L—enny?

PETER.

It ain't an agreeable job, pitchin' into a fellow you've been on good terms with; but the fact remains—to put it mildly—that Master Lenny's a stoopid, blunderin' cub.

ZOE.

[*Haughtily but palpitatingly.*] He's nothing of the kind. What has he done that you should abuse him?

PETER.

It's he who's told you that Theodore was at the Carlton last night, ain't it? [*She drops her eyes.*] Been here this mornin'?

ZOE.

[*Raising her eyes, boldly.*] Yes.

PETER.

H'm! The sick rabbit doesn't hide in her burrow from everybody.

ZOE.

H—how——?

PETER.

I saw your lips make an L just now, before you could put the stopper on.

ZOE.

Ha, ha! You ought to have been a professional detective.

PETER.

[*Scowling.*] Ferris has kept out of my way lately, or I——

ZOE.

If he *has* run in here for a moment—to ask whether I'm back—is there anything particularly cubbish in that?

PETER.

It wasn't *that* I was referrin' to.

ZOE.

N—no?

PETER.

I was referrin' to his havin' the damned presumption to dance attendance on you in Italy.

ZOE.

[*Aghast.*] I—Italy?

PETER.

He was at Perugia while you were there.

ZOE.

Oh—Perugia——

PETER.

[*With a shrug.*] And other places, I assoom.

ZOE.

[*After a pause, pulling herself together.*] H—ho! [*mimicking* PETER.] And who supplies the information? [PETER *waves the question from him.*] Lowenstein, by any chance —Claud Lowenstein? [PETER, *looking down his nose, is silent. She rises and walks away from him.*] The hound—the little hound!

PETER.

Lowenstein came across you both at some railway station. He arrived at Perugia the day you left.

ZOE.

[*Pacing the room on the right.*] The contemptible little hound!

PETER.

He put up at the Brufani too.

ZOE.

[*Stopping in her walk—under her breath.*] Ah!

PETER.

Master Lenny might at least have had the common decency to quarter himself at another hotel.

ZOE.

The—the Brufani is the most comfortable—the—[*A pause.*] I—I suppose it *was* thoughtless of Lenny.

PETER.

[*Quietly.*] Cub!

ZOE.

[*Approaching* PETER.] Does—Theodore—know?

PETER.

[*Nodding.*] Lowenstein went to him with it.

ZOE.

Ha, ha! A busy gentleman—Claudy Lowenstein! [*Falteringly.*] It—it was all my fault, Peter. If—if anybody's to blame, I am. I—I wrote to the boy from Florence—complaining of feeling lonely——

PETER.

That doesn't excuse him.

ZOE.

[*Touching* PETER'S *shoulder with the tips of her fingers.*] What—what does Theodore——?

PETER.

He's savage.

ZOE.

Savage?

PETER.

[*Rising.*] He'd like to punch Ferris's head—as I should.

ZOE.

[*In a low voice.*] Savage—! [*Slowly.*] He—he's jealous then? [*A shrug from* PETER. *Her eyes light up.*] Jealous! [*A pause.*] Peter—no man's jealous over a woman—unless he—unless he cares for her! [*Plucking at his sleeve.*] Peter!

PETER.

You've heard me say old Theo's miserable—desperately wretched.

ZOE.

He—he's grown fond of me again—fond of me——!

PETER.

My dear, you and he have never left off bein' fond o' one another, actually. As I warned you, you've only been tossin' about, both of you, on a bit o' troubled water.

[*She stares at him for a moment with an expressionless face and then, as if stupefied, seats herself in the chair on the left of the oblong table.*

PETER.

[*Standing before her.*] Well, at any rate, you'll let this Italian business be a lesson to you not to rush at conclusions respectin' other people. So, come now; won't you try to patch it up? I'll bet my noo hat, Theodore'll meet you halfway. [*Urgently.*] Zoe!

ZOE.

[*Locking and unlocking her fingers again.*] Peter——

PETER.

Eh?

ZOE.

Your Mr. and Mrs. Tom—the world perhaps never heard of *their* fall-out.

PETER.

What o' that?

ZOE.

Everybody is aware of the split between me and Theo.

PETER.

Everybody! A handful! Besides, nothin' is even a nine days' wonder in these times. [*A pause.*] Will you do it?

ZOE.

[*Suddenly, starting up and walking away to the left.*] Oh, no, no, no! I—can't—I can't!

PETER.

[*Following her.*] Can't?

ZOE.

[*Helplessly.*] I can't, Peter!

PETER.

[*Taking her by the arms.*] Oh—!

ZOE.

I—I mean I—I'm sure it wouldn't answer—I'm sure——

PETER.

My dear girl——

ZOE.

[*Piteously.*] Ah, don't—don't! [*Escaping from him and crossing to the right.*] Oh, leave me alone!

[WARREN *enters at the glazed door.*

WARREN.

[*To* ZOE.] Miss Pierpoint is downstairs, ma'am.

ZOE.

[*Seizing upon the interruption.*] Ah, yes!

WARREN.

I'm to give you her love, ma'am, and if it isn't convenient for you to see her——

ZOE.

It is—it *is*—quite convenient—quite. [WARREN *withdraws, closing the door.*] I'm awfully sorry, my dear Peter, but this child wants to consult me about something—something important. [*Giving him her hands.*] I must kick you out. You don't feel hurt, do you?

PETER.

[*Ruefully.*] Confound Miss Pierpoint! Zoe——

ZOE.

What?

PETER.

You'll think it over?

ZOE.

[*Putting her hand to his lips.*] Ah——!

PETER.

[*Holding her hand.*] No, no. Think it over. Ask me to dine with you one night next week.

ZOE.

Monday—Tuesday——?

PETER.

Monday.

ZOE.

[*Artfully.*] Ah, but I shall lay in a chaperon for the occasion.

PETER.

Rats! How can I talk to you before a chaperon?

ZOE.

Ha, ha, ha, ha! [*She runs to the glazed door, opens it, and, going into the corridor, calls loudly and excitedly.*] Ethel—Ethel—Ethel——! [ETHEL *appears in the corridor and* ZOE *embraces her with an excess of warmth.*] My dear Ethel! My dear child! [*They kiss.*] What ages since we've seen each other! [*Bringing* ETHEL *into the room.*] You know Mr. Mottram?

ETHEL.

[*Going to* PETER.] Oh, yes.

PETER.

[*Shaking hands with her.*] How-d'ye-do, Miss Pierpoint —and *au revoir.*

ETHEL.

[*As he moves towards the glazed door.*] I'm not driving you away?

PETER.

I forgive you.

[*He rejoins* ZOE *who is near the door.* ETHEL *lays her sunshade upon the writing-table.*

ZOE.

[*To* PETER.] Monday night?

PETER.

Monday night.

ZOE.

Half-past eight.

PETER.

[*At the door, dropping his voice.*] A chaperon?

ZOE.

[*Mockingly.*] The proprieties!

PETER.

You cat!

[*He goes.*

ZOE.

[*Closing the door.*] Ha, ha! [*She leans wearily against the door for a moment and again puts back her hair from her brow. Her manner now becomes strained, artificial,* distrait. *She advances to* ETHEL.] Now, then! [ETHEL *turns to her.*] Let me have a good squint at you. How's your dear mother?

ETHEL.

[*Who is pale and sad-looking.*] Mother's flourishing. [*Leaving the writing-table.*] You're not angry with me for rushing you at this hour?

ZOE.

Isn't this our old hour for a chat?

ETHEL.

We were at Madame Levine's yesterday—mother and I —ordering frocks, and Camille, the skirtmaker, told us you were back. Zoe, how unkind you've been!

ZOE.

Am I in your bad books?

ETHEL.

Why have you treated us so horridly?

ZOE.

Well, my dear child, the fact is—the fact is it suddenly dawned on me that perhaps your mother mightn't consider me any longer a suitable pal for her daughter.

ETHEL.

[*Protestingly.*] Oh!

ZOE.

Heaps of folks, you know, haven't much use for single married-women.

ETHEL.

But we both showed you that our sympathies were on your side!

ZOE.

Yes, we often sympathise with people we wouldn't touch with the end of a wet umbrella.

ETHEL.

[*Coming close to* ZOE.] So that's the reason you left off answering my letters!

ZOE.

C-certainly.

ETHEL.

And why we hear of your return through fat old Camille! [*Fingering a jewel at* ZOE'S *neck.*] You've had a pleasant time abroad?

ZOE.

[*Taking* ETHEL'S *face between her hands, abruptly.*] How thin your face is, Ethel!

ETHEL.

[*Gazing at* ZOE.] *Your* cheeks are not as round as they were.

ZOE.

[*Leading* ETHEL *to the settee on the right.*] I caught a rotten chill on board the boat and have been beastly seedy. [*Putting* ETHEL *on the settee.*] What's wrong with you? That's a dreary note I've had from you this morning.

ETHEL.

[*Tracing a pattern on the floor with the point of her shoe.*] Now I'm with you, I—I can't——

ZOE.

[*Looking down upon her.*] You want advice, you say.

ETHEL.

[*Tremulously.*] Yes.

ZOE.

Or a good shaking.

ETHEL.

I—I suppose I ought to be ashamed of myself for being so, but I—I'm very unhappy, Zoe.

ZOE.

Unhappy?

ETHEL.

It's no use my attempting to talk to mother. Mother's a person who prides herself on her level-headedness. Anybody with a fixed income and a poor circulation can be level-headed! It only means you're fish-like. But you—you're warm-blooded and human——

ZOE.

Well?

ETHEL.

Z-Zoe——

ZOE.

Yes?

ETHEL.

[*Her eyes on the ground.*] Did you ever suspect that there was anything between Mr. Ferris and me?

ZOE.

[*Calmly, steadying herself.*] Mr. Ferris—and you?

ETHEL.

An attachment.

ZOE.

[*With affected astonishment.*] My dear child!

ETHEL.

[*Looking up.*] Oh, don't keep on calling me "child"! I'm nearly six-and-twenty. [*Taking* ZOE'S *hands.*] *Didn't* you ever guess?

ZOE.

He—he always seemed delighted to meet you here.

ETHEL.

He's one of your "boys"—hasn't he ever talked to you about me?

ZOE.

Of course, frequently.

ETHEL.

Never as if he were—in love with me?

ZOE.

[*Withdrawing her hands.*] I—I can't say that it—struck me——

ETHEL.

[*Dejectedly.*] You didn't know, perhaps, that at the beginning of the year—before you went away—he was a great deal in Sloane Street?

ZOE.

Why, yes, he used to have tea with you and your mother sometimes, didn't he? [*Turning from* ETHEL.] How did I hear that?

ETHEL.

[*Hanging her head.*] Very often he came early in the afternoon—by arrangement with me—while mother was resting.

ZOE.

[*With a hard laugh.*] Ha, ha! Ethel!

ETHEL.

Yes, worthy of a vulgar shop-girl, wasn't it?

ZOE.

[*Sitting in the chair opposite* ETHEL.] He—he came early in the afternoon——?

ETHEL.

And we sat together, in the fire-light. I'm sure he loved me, Zoe—then.

ZOE.

[*Breathing heavily.*] And—and *you*——?

ETHEL.

[*Her elbows on her knees, hiding her face in her hands.*] Oh, I'm a fool—an awful fool!

ZOE.

[*After a silence.*] Did he ever—hint—at marriage? [ETHEL *nods, without uncovering her face.*] He did!

ETHEL.

[*Raising her head.*] Well, we got as far as agreeing that a small house in the country, near his aunt, would be an ideal state of existence. [*Mirthlessly.*] Ha, ha, ha! And there matters broke off.

ZOE.

What—what——?

ETHEL.

All of a sudden there was a change—a change in his manner towards me. He still called on us, but not so regularly; and by degrees his visits—ceased altogether. [*She passes her hand across her eyes angrily and, stamping her foot, rises and moves to the other side of the room.*] The last time I spoke to him was one morning in the Row. Mother and I were walking and came face-to-face with him. That was at the end of February. He was out of sorts, he said, and was going into Devonshire. I presume he went. [*Turning to* ZOE *who, with parted lips, is staring guiltily at the carpet.*] He's in London now, though. I saw him about a fortnight ago, at the Opera. I was with the Ormerods, in their box; he was in the stalls. [*Touching* ZOE's *shoulder.*] Zoe——

ZOE.

Yes?

ETHEL.

He's so altered.

ZOE.

Altered?

ETHEL.

In his appearance. You recollect how boyish and fresh-looking he was?

ZOE.

Y-yes.

ETHEL.

All that's gone. He's become—oh, but I dare say you've seen him since you've been home?

ZOE.

J-just for a minute or two.

ETHEL.

You must have noticed——?

ZOE.

N-now you mention it——

ETHEL.

I watched him through the opera-glass several times during the evening. [*Simply.*] He looks like a lost soul.

ZOE.

I—I've never—ha, ha!—I've never made the acquaintance of a lost—ha, ha!——

ETHEL.

[*After a pause.*] Zoe, do you think anything has happened to Lenny Ferris?

ZOE.

H-happened?

ETHEL.

Anything bad.

ZOE.

Bad?

ETHEL.

Men's lives are constantly being wrecked by racing, or cards, or——[*Half turning from* ZOE.] Oh, I oughtn't to know about such things, but one doesn't live in the dark—he may have got mixed up with some woman of the wrong sort, mayn't he?

ZOE.

[*Rising quickly and walking away to the left.*] I—I really can't discuss topics of that kind with you, Ethel.

ETHEL.

[*Wistfully.*] No; but if he *is* in any scrape—any entanglement—and one could help him——

ZOE.

[*At the writing-table, taking up a bottle of salts—faintly.*] Help him?

ETHEL.

Save him——!

ZOE.

[*Sniffing the salts.*] How—how romantic you are!

ETHEL.

Am I! [*Her elbows on the back of the arm-chair by the oblong table, timidly.*] Zoe, would it be possible—in your opinion—would it be possible for me to—to see him?

ZOE.

[*Sitting in the chair at the writing-table.*] See Mr. Ferris?

ETHEL.

[*Plucking at the cover of the chair on which she is leaning.*] Here—in your house—or elsewhere—see him and offer him my friendship—a sister's friendship? *You* could manage it.

ZOE.

My—my dear!

ETHEL.

Oh, yes, I'm lacking in dignity, aren't I—and self-respect! [*Coming forward.*] I've told myself that a thousand times. [*Warmly.*] But there are quite enough dignified people in the world without me; and if I could influence Lenny, anyone might have my dignity for twopence.

ZOE.

Influence him——?

ETHEL.

For his good. Oh, I don't want to boast, but I'm a straight, clean girl; and it may be that, at this particular

moment of his life, the more he sees of women like you and me the better. However, if you tell me the idea's improper, I'll accept it from you. [*Approaching* ZOE.] I'll take anything from you. [*Appealingly.*] But don't tell me that, if you can avoid it. Give me the opportunity, if you can, of showing him that I'm different from most girls—that I'm above petty, resentful feelings. [*Bending over* ZOE.] Zoe——

[LENA *enters at the further door on the right, carrying a silver salver on which are a dose of medicine in a medicine-glass and a dish of sweetmeats.*

LENA.

Your med'cine! [*Closing the door.*] Good morning, Miss Pierpoint.

ETHEL.

Ah, Lena!

ZOE.

[*To* ETHEL, *rising hastily.*] Excuse me——

[LENA *advances and* ZOE *goes to her and, with a shaking hand, drinks the medicine.*

LENA.

[*To* ZOE.] Good gracious, how queer you look! [*To* ETHEL.] She's doing too much to-day, Miss Pierpoint. [*Going to* ETHEL.] Dr. Rashleigh says she's frightfully below par.

ETHEL.

[*Picking up her sunshade.*] What a shame of me! [*Running to* ZOE.] I won't stay another minute.

ZOE.

[*Sitting on the settee on the right.*] I *am* a little fatigued.

ETHEL.

I ought to have seen it.

ZOE.

I—I'll write to you. [*They kiss.*] My love to your mother.

ETHEL.

And when you are well enough——?

ZOE.

I'll call upon her.

ETHEL.

[*To* LENA, *who precedes her into the corridor.*] No, no; stop with Mrs. Blundell. I'm so sorry, Lena——

[LENA *and* ETHEL *talk together for a little while in undertones; then the girl disappears.* LENA *returns.*

LENA.

[*Shutting the door.*] Silly chatterbox! [*Finding* ZOE *lying at full length upon the settee, her head buried in a pillow.*] Why do you tire yourself like this? Shall I fetch you some brandy?

ZOE.

No.

LENA.

[*Lowering her voice.*] He's in the house again.

ZOE.

Who?

LENA.

Mr. Ferris.

ZOE.

[*Raising herself.*] Mr. Ferris!

LENA.

[*With a jerk of her head in the direction of the next room.*] In there. [ZOE *sits upright.*] Warren's making himself beautiful and Clara answered the door. She thought

you were by yourself and let him come up. [ZOE *gets to her feet.*] I was just bringing you your med'cine and met him. [ZOE *goes to the writing-table, takes up the hand-mirror, and puts her hair in order.*] Lucky I'd heard that Miss Pierpoint was here; he didn't want to see her! Another second——!

ZOE.

That'll do. [*Calmly.*] Take care I'm not interrupted again.

LENA.

Ah, now! Mayn't I get rid of him?

ZOE.

No. [*Turning.*] Run away, please.

LENA.

Oh, very good. [*Picking up the salver which she has placed upon a piece of furniture near the glazed door.*] You'll do exactly as you choose. [*In the corridor.*] I declare I'd rather look after a pack of unruly children any day in the week——

[*She closes the door.* ZOE *glances over her shoulder, to assure herself that the woman has left the room, and then, with a fierce light in her eyes, goes to the nearer door on the right and throws it open.*

ZOE.

[*In a hard voice, speaking into the adjoining room.*] I'm alone.

[*She moves from the door as* LEONARD, *still carrying his hat and cane, enters.*

LEONARD.

By George, that was a narrow squeak! [*Closing the door.*] Whatever possessed you to be at home to the Pierpoint girl this morning?

ZOE.

[*Coldly.*] I didn't expect you back before lunch.

LEONARD.

[*Putting his hat and cane on the chair at the nearer end of the settee on the right.*] I was talking to a man at Victoria Gate and I saw Peter driving away in a Taxi. [*Facing her.*] I got sick of the Park. [*Seeing that something is amiss.*] Hallo! [*A pause.*] Anyone been running me down?

[*She advances to him and, drawing herself to her full height, regards him scornfully.*

ZOE.

[*Making a motion with her hands as if she would strike him.*] You—you—! [*Dropping her hands to her side.*] Oh, cruel—cruel—[*walking away from him*] cruel!

LEONARD.

What's cruel? Who's cruel!

ZOE.

[*At the further end of the room, on the right.*] Ah—ah——!

LEONARD.

[*Moving to the left.*] Oh, come! Let's have it out; let's have it out.

ZOE.

Sssh! Don't raise your voice here.

LEONARD.

Somebody's been talking against me. Ethel Pierpoint?

ZOE.

[*Coming to the oblong table.*] You've behaved abominably to this girl.

LEONARD.

Ho, it *is* Miss Pierpoint!

ZOE.

No, she hasn't spoken a word against you. But she's opened her heart to me.

LEONARD.

[*Going to* ZOE.] You've known all about me and Ethel.

ZOE.

It's a lie. How much have I known? I knew that you were sizing her up, as you expressed it; but I never surmised that you'd as good as proposed marriage to her.

LEONARD.

I told you months ago—admitted it—that I'd make myself a bit of an idiot over Ethel. I fancied you tumbled to the state o' things.

ZOE.

Did you! Why, do you think—maniac as I was when you came through to me to Florence!—do you think I'd have allowed you to remain near me for five minutes if I'd known as much as I do now!

LEONARD.

Look here, Zoe——

ZOE.

Oh, you're a cruel fellow! You've been cruel to her and cruel to me. I believe you're capable of being cruel to any woman who comes your way. Still, *she's* the fortunate one. Her scratches'll heal; but I—[*sitting at the oblong table and hitting it with her fist*] I loathe myself more than ever—more than ever!

LEONARD.

[*After a pause.*] Zoe, I wish you'd try to be a little fair to me.

ZOE.

[*Ironically.*] Fair!

LEONARD.

Perhaps I did go rather further with Ethel Pierpoint than I led you to understand.

ZOE.

Oh——!

LEONARD.

I own up. Yes, but what prospect was there, when I was thick with her, of your being free of Blundell? None. And what was I to you? Merely a pal of yours—one of your "tame robins"—one of a dozen; and I'd come to a loose end in my life. It was simply the fact that there *was* no prospect for me with you that drove me to consider whether I hadn't better settle down to a humdrum with a decent girl of the Ethel breed. Otherwise, do you imagine I'd have crossed the street to speak to another woman? [*Leaving* ZOE.] Oh, you might do me common justice! [*Hotly.*] If circumstances *have* made a cad of me, am I *all* black? Can't you find *any* good in me? [*Turning to her.*] What did I tell you at Perugia?

ZOE.

[*Rising.*] Ah, don't——!

LEONARD.

That I'd been in love with you from the day I first met you—from the very moment Mrs. Hope-Cornish introduced me to you at Sandown! Well! Isn't there anything to my credit on that score? Didn't I keep my secret? For four years I kept it; though, with matters as they often were between you and Blundell, many a man might have thought you ripe grapes. [*Walking across to the right.*] Only once I was off my guard with you—when I laid hold of you and begged you, whatever happened, never to—never to——

ZOE.

[*Leaning against the table, her back to him.*] Ha, ha, ha!

LEONARD.

Yes, and I meant it; as God hears me, I meant it. If anybody had told me that afternoon that it was I who—oh, hang! [*Sitting upon the settee.*] But what I want to impress upon you is that, if I were quite the low scoundrel you make me out to be, I shouldn't have gone through what I *have* gone through these past four years and more. Great Scot, it's been nothing but hell—hot hell—all the time! Four whole years of pretending I was just an ordinary friend of yours—hell! Four years of reasoning with myself—preaching to myself—hell! That awful month after Blundell left you—when you'd gone to Italy and I was in London—worse than hell! My chase after you—our little tour together—my struggle even then to play the correct game—and I *did* struggle—hell! And since then—hell! [*His elbows on his knees, digging his knuckles into his forehead.*] Hell all the time! Hell all the time!

[*There is a silence, and then, with a look of settled determination, she comes to him slowly and lays her hands upon his head.*

ZOE.

Poor boy! I'm sorry I blackguarded you. [*Sitting in the chair opposite to him and speaking in a steady, level voice.*] Len——

LEONARD.

Eh?

ZOE.

Let's part.

LEONARD.

[*Raising his head.*] Part?

ZOE.

Say good-bye to each other. [*Meeting his eyes.*] Go back to that girl.

LEONARD.

To Ethel!

ZOE.

Take up with her again.

LEONARD.

Oh, stop it, Zo.

ZOE.

She's devoted to you; and she's sound right through, if ever a girl was. She's one of the best, Len.

LEONARD.

Suppose she *is*——

ZOE.

Be careful that she doesn't guess I've given her away. [*He rises impatiently. She rises with him and holds him by the lapels of his jacket.*] Tell her—she's sure to ask you—tell her that you haven't seen me since last Monday, nor had a line from me. Fake up some tale to account for your breaking off with her—you were in doubt whether you'd coin enough to marry on——

LEONARD.

[*Who has become thoughtful.*] Zoe——

ZOE.

Yes?

LEONARD.

[*Looking her full in the face.*] Are you giving me the boot?

ZOE.

[*Releasing him and returning his gaze firmly.*] Yes; I am.

LEONARD.

[*After a pause.*] Oh? [*Another pause.*] What's your motive?

ZOE.

Motive?

LEONARD.

What's behind all this?

ZOE.

[*Simply.*] I want you to be happy, Len—really and truly happy. I believe you'd stand a jolly good chance of being so with Ethel Pierpoint; never with me.

LEONARD.

And *you*?

ZOE.

I?

LEONARD.

What's to become of *you*? What are your plans for yourself?

ZOE.

[*Avoiding his eyes.*] Oh, don't you—don't you worry about me.

LEONARD.

Rot!

ZOE.

[*Nervously.*] Perhaps some day—when Theodore's tired of Mrs. Annerly—ha, ha!—stranger things have happened——

LEONARD.

Rot, I say. [*She retreats a little.*] Do you think you can drum me out like this! [*Following her.*] Have you got some other——?

[*He checks himself.*

ZOE.

[*Confronting him.*] Some other——?

LEONARD.

Oh, never mind.

ZOE.

Out with it!

LEONARD.

Some other fancy-man in tow?

ZOE.

Ah! You brute! [*Hitting him in the chest.*] You brute! [*Throwing herself into the arm-chair near the glazed door.*] You coward! You coward!

[*There is a pause and then he slouches up to her.*

LEONARD.

I—I beg your pardon. I beg your pardon. [*He sits beside her, upon the fauteuil-stool.*] Knock my damned head off. Go on. Knock my damned head off.

ZOE.

[*Panting.*] Well—we won't part—on top of a row. [*Dashing a tear away.*] After all, why *should* you think better of me than that?

LEONARD.

[*Penitently.*] Zoe——

ZOE.

Sssh! Listen. Putting Ethel Pierpoint out of the question, do you ever picture to yourself what our married life would be?

LEONARD.

What it 'ud be?

ZOE.

The marriage of a woman of seven—nearly eight—and-thirty to a man of thirty-two! *I* do. I walk my bedroom half the night and act it all over to myself. And you've had the best of me, too; I'm not even a novelty to you. Why, of course you've realized what you've let yourself in for.

LEONARD.

I take my oath——

ZOE.

Sssh! When you're in front of your glass in the morning, what do you see there?

LEONARD.

See?

ZOE.

This girl has noticed the alteration in your looks. She took stock of you at the opera the other night.

LEONARD.

[*Passing his hands over his face consciously.*] Men can't go to hell, Zo, without getting a bit scorched.

ZOE.

[*Imitating his action.*] No, nor women either. [*Turning to him.*] But it's only quite lately that you've lost your bloom, Len.

LEONARD.

Oh, naturally I've been horribly bothered about you—about both of us—since——

ZOE.

Since your trip to Italy? [*He nods.*] Yes, and naturally you've told yourself, over and over again, the truth—since your trip to Italy.

LEONARD.

Truth?

ZOE.

The simple truth—that you've got into a mess with a married woman——

LEONARD.

I—I——

ZOE.

And that you must go through with it, at all costs.

LEONARD.

I swear to you, Zoe——

ZOE.

[*Touching his hand.*] Oh, my dear boy, you haven't perhaps *said* these things to yourself, in so many words, but they're at the back of your brain just the same.

[*She rises and crosses to the fireplace and rings three times.*

LEONARD.

[*Rising.*] What—what are you doing?

ZOE.

Ringing for Lena, to tell her I'm not lunching downstairs.

LEONARD.

By God, Zoe——!

ZOE.

[*Imperiously.*] Be quiet!

LEONARD.

[*Shaking his fist at her.*] You dare treat me in this way! You dare!

ZOE.

[*Advancing.*] Ah, I'm only hurting your pride a little; I'm only mortifying your vanity. You'll get over that in twenty-four hours.

LEONARD.

Do you know what you *are;* do you know what you make yourself by this!

ZOE.

Yes, what you made of me at Perugia, and at Siena, and at——! [*Suddenly, clinging to him.*] Lenny—Lenny—kiss me——!

LEONARD.

[*Pushing her from him.*] Not I.

ZOE.

Ah, yes. Don't let's part enemies. It's good-bye. Lenny!

LEONARD.

No.

ZOE.

[*Struggling with him entreatingly.*] Quick! It's for the last time. You'll never be alone with me again. [*Her arms tightly round him.*] It's for the last time. [*Kissing him passionately.*] Good luck to you! Good luck to you! Good luck to you!

[*She leaves him and sits at the writing-table where she makes a pretence of busying herself with her papers.*

LEONARD.

[*Glancing expectantly at the glazed door—between his teeth.*] You—you——!

[*Presently he goes to the chair on the right and snatches up his hat and cane.* LENA *enters at the glazed door.*

LENA.

[*To* ZOE.] Is it me you've rung for?

ZOE.

Yes. [*Sharply.*] Wait.

[*There is a pause. Struck by* ZOE'S *tone, and the attitude of the pair,* LENA *looks inquisitively at* LEONARD *and* ZOE *out of the corners of her eyes, as if she guesses there has been a quarrel.* LEONARD *moves towards the door.*

LEONARD.

[*To* ZOE.] Good morning.

ZOE.

Good morning.

LEONARD.

[*To* LENA, *as he passes her.*] Good morning.

LENA.

Good morning.

[*He departs and* LENA *quietly closes the door.*

ZOE.

[*Rising.*] Lena——

LENA.

Yes?

ZOE.

[*Walking across to the settee on the right.*] I'm not coming down to the dining-room. [*Sitting, feebly.*] Let me have a snack upstairs.

LENA.

Very well.

ZOE.

That's all.

[LENA *withdraws, almost on tip-toe, and* ZOE *instantly produces her handkerchief and cries into it softly. Then she gets to her feet and searches for the cigarette box. Still shaken by little sobs, she puts a cigarette between her lips and, as she does so, the expression of her face changes and her body stiffens.*

ZOE.

[*Under her breath.*] Oh——! [*After a moment's irresolution, she hurriedly dries her eyes and, going to the glazed door, opens it, and calls.*] Lena—Lena——!

LENA.

[*In the distance.*] Yes?

[ZOE *returns to the oblong table and is lighting her cigarette when* LENA *reappears.*

ZOE.

Lena——

LENA.

Well?

ZOE.

I'll dress directly after lunch.

LENA.

[*Coming to her, surprised.*] Dress?

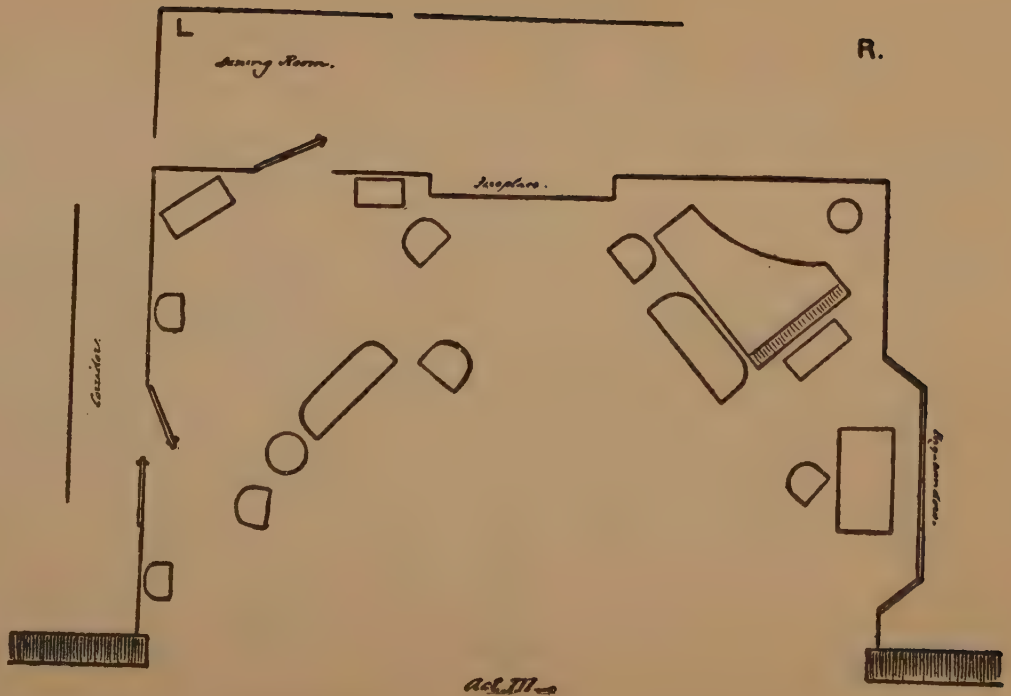
ZOE.

Yes; I'm going out this afternoon.

LENA.

Going out! Why, you must be crazy——!

END OF THE SECOND ACT


L
R.
Fireplace.
Act III

THE THIRD ACT

The scene is a fine, spacious room, richly furnished and decorated. In the centre of the wall at the back is the fireplace, and on the left of the fireplace is a door which when open reveals part of a dining-room. In the right-hand wall there is a bay-window hung with lace and other curtains. Facing the window, in the wall on the left, is a double-door opening into the room from a corridor.

On either side of the fireplace there is an arm-chair, and between the fireplace and the dining-room door stands a small table on which are a decanter of whiskey, a syphon of soda-water, and two or three tumblers. A grand piano and a music-stool are in the right-hand corner of the room, and on the left of the piano is a settee. Some photographs are on the top of the piano. On the other side of the room there is a second settee with a table at the nearer end of it. An arm-chair stands by this table, another at the further end of the settee. In the bay-window there is a writing-table with a writing-chair before it, and on the writing-table is a telephone-instrument. Other articles of furniture, some pieces of sculpture, and some handsome lamps on pedestals, fill spaces not provided for in this description.

A scarf of mousseline de soie *and a pair of white gloves lie on the chair on the right of the fireplace.*

The fireless grate is hidden by a screen and, through the lace curtains, which are drawn over the window, a fierce sunlight is seen.

The door at the back is slightly ajar.

[*The telephone bell rings and presently* THEODORE BLUNDELL *enters at the door at the back, and goes to the writing-table. His step has become heavier, his shoulders are somewhat bent, and he looks a "bad colour."*

THEODORE.

[*At the telephone.*] Hallo! . . . Yes? . . . I *am* Mr. Blundell. . . . Oh, is that you, Peter? . . . What? . . . Want to see me? . . . Anything wrong? . . . Where are you? . . . Where? . . . Café Royal? . . . Come along to me now, then. . . . Oh, I say! . . . Are you there? . . . [*Dropping his voice.*] I say! Mrs. A. is lunching with me. . . . Mrs. A.—Alice. . . . No, but I thought I'd tell you. . . . Good-bye.

[*He is about to return to the dining-room when* MRS. ANNERLY *appears in the doorway at the back. She is a pretty, charmingly-dressed creature with classical, immobile features and a simple, virginal air.*

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Advancing.*] I've told Cole we'll have coffee in this room. [*He nods and sits moodily upon the settee on the right. Resting her elbows on the back of the arm-chair at the further end of the settee on the left, she surveys her face in a tiny mirror which she carries, with some other trinkets, attached to a chain.*] Who's that you were talking to on the 'phone, boy dear?

THEODORE.

[*Who is smoking a big cigar.*] Mottram.

MRS. ANNERLY.

What's *he* want?

THEODORE.

Wants to see me about something.

MRS. ANNERLY.

Business?

THEODORE.

Dun'no.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Sweetly.*] He doesn't like poor little me.

THEODORE.

[*Indifferently.*] Doesn't he?

MRS. ANNERLY.

You know he doesn't. [*Arranging a curl.*] That's why you gave him the tip that I'm lunching here.

THEODORE.

Ho! Listeners—*et cætera.*

MRS. ANNERLY.

I couldn't help hearing you; positively I couldn't. [*Examining her teeth in the mirror.*] He's one of your wife's tame cats, isn't he?

THEODORE.

He's a friend of hers—yes.

MRS. ANNERLY.

Just a friend, and nothing else.

THEODORE.

[*Angrily.*] Now, look here, Alice——!

[COLE, *a manservant, enters from the dining-room with the coffee and liqueurs.* MRS. ANNERLY *takes a cup of coffee.*

COLE.

[*To* MRS. ANNERLY.] Brandy—Kümmel, ma'am?

MRS. ANNERLY.

No, thanks.

THEODORE.

[*To* COLE, *who comes to him with the tray—irritably.*] Leave it. [COLE *places the tray on the top of the piano and is returning to the dining-room.*] Cole——

COLE.

Yessir?

THEODORE.

I'm expecting Mr. Mottram.

COLE.

Very good, sir.

[*The man withdraws, closing the door.* THEODORE *rises and pours some brandy into a large liqueur-glass.*

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Who has seated herself upon the settee on the left.*] What's the matter with you to-day, boy dear? You're as cross as two sticks.

THEODORE.

Liver.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Sipping her coffee.*] I don't wonder.

THEODORE.

Why?

MRS. ANNERLY.

You're getting rather too fond of—[*pointing to the brandy*] h'm, h'm.

THEODORE.

[*Bluntly.*] It's false.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*With undisturbed complacency.*] I've seen so much of that sort o' thing in my time. [*He makes a movement, as if to put down his glass without drinking.*] Still, I must say you've every excuse.

THEODORE.

Alice——

MRS. ANNERLY.

What?

[*He gulps his brandy, puts the empty glass on the tray, and comes to her.*

THEODORE.

[*Standing before her.*] Alice, will you oblige me by refraining from making any allusion to my wife, direct or indirect, in the future? It annoys me.

MRS. ANNERLY.

Everything annoys you this afternoon.

THEODORE.

You were at it last night, at the Carlton. And to-day, during lunch——

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*In an injured tone.*] It was you who told me that that little Jew chap had met her careering about Italy with young what's-his-name. [*He sits in the arm-chair at the further end of the settee and leans his head on his hand.*] Ah, but that was in your loving days—when you used to confide in me.

THEODORE.

I was in a rage and said a great deal more than I thought.

MRS. ANNERLY.

If you did, you needn't jump on me for trying to feel interested in you and your affairs.

THEODORE.

[*Facing her.*] At any rate, understand me clearly, Alice—and then drop the subject. [*Shortly.*] Mrs. Blundell and

I are separated; she's gone one way, I another. There were faults on both sides, as usual, but I was mainly to blame. There's the thing in a nut-shell.

MRS. ANNERLY.

This isn't in the least your old story.

THEODORE.

Never mind my old story. [*Extending a forefinger.*] *You* forget the old story, my girl, if you wish our acquaintance to continue—d'ye hear?

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Shaking herself.*] You're a nasty savage.

THEODORE.

As for that interfering cad Lowenstein, it unfortunately happens that one of Mrs. Blundell's characteristics is a habit of disregarding *les convenances*—a habit which I didn't go the right way to check. It's probable that, before she's done, she won't leave herself with as much reputation as 'ud cover a sixpence. She's impulsive, reckless, a fool—but she's no worse. [*Eyeing the stump of his cigar fiercely.*] My wife's no worse. So, hands off, if you please, in my presence. Whatever reports are circulated to her discredit, the man who speaks against her in my hearing is kicked for his pains; and the woman who does so, if she's under my roof, gets taken by the shoulders and shown the mat. [*Looking at her.*] *Comprenez?*

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Pouting.*] I should be a juggins if I didn't. *Parfaitement*—in my very best French.

THEODORE.

[*Rising and walking about.*] That's settled, then.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*After a pause, rising and depositing her cup upon the table on the left—thoughtfully.*] Boy dear——

THEODORE.

[*At the back.*] Hey?

MRS. ANNERLY.

It was regular cat-and-dog between you two at the end, wasn't it?

THEODORE.

[*Breaking out again.*] It's no concern of yours whether it was or was not. I've asked you——

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Crossing to the right, with a shrug.*] Oh——!

THEODORE.

Yes, it *was.* [*Half-sitting upon the back of the settee on the left.*] I—I tired of her.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Philosophically.*] Ah, men *do* tire.

THEODORE.

And she of me. We'd been married close upon fourteen years.

MRS. ANNERLY.

Oh, well, come; that's a long while.

THEODORE.

[*As much to himself as to her.*] Our wedding-day's on the thirtieth of this month. [*Hitting the back of the settee softly with his fist.*] We'd reached a time in our lives when —when we were in mid-Channel——

MRS. ANNERLY.

Mid-Channel?

THEODORE.

[*Rising.*] Oh, you don't know anything about that.

[*There is a further silence. She sits upon the settee on the right, watching him as he moves about the room again.*

MRS. ANNERLY.

Here! [*Beckoning him with a motion of her head.*] Here! [*He goes to her. She looks up into his face.*] Why don't you marry *me,* Theo?

THEODORE.

[*Staring at her.*] Marry—you?

MRS. ANNERLY.

You'd find me awfully easy to get on with.

THEODORE.

[*Turning from her, quietly.*] Oh——!

MRS. ANNERLY.

Wait; you might listen, anyhow. [*He turns to her.*] I *am*—awfully easy to get on with. And I'd be as strict as —as strict as a nun. Honest injun! I treated Annerly pretty badly, but that's ancient history. I was only seventeen when I married Frank—too inexperienced for words. I've learnt a lot since.

THEODORE.

[*Bitterly.*] Ha!

MRS. ANNERLY.

Now, don't be satirical. [*Inviting him to sit by her side.*] Theo——[*He sits beside her.*] I say—bar chaff—I wish you *would.*

THEODORE.

[*Absently.*] What?

MRS. ANNERLY.

Marry me. Really I do. [*A note of wistfulness in her voice.*] I really do want to re-establish myself. My life, these past few years, has been frightfully unsatisfactory.

THEODORE.

[*Touching her dress, sympathetically.*] Ah!

MRS. ANNERLY.

And I'm a lady, remember—giddy as I may have been. Put me in any society and I'm presentable, as far as manners go. I'd soon right myself, with your assistance. [*Slipping her arm through his.*] I suppose, under the circumstances, you couldn't divorce *her,* could you?

THEODORE.

What d'ye mean?

MRS. ANNERLY.

Your wife—over that Italian business.

THEODORE.

[*Jumping up.*] Damn!

MRS. ANNERLY.

Oh, I beg your pardon; it slipped out. [*He walks away to the table at the back and begins to mix himself a whiskey-and-soda.*] I'm dreadfully grieved; gospel, I am. [*Rising.*] Don't—don't, boy dear. Do leave that stuff alone. [*He puts down the decanter and comes to the settee on the left.*] I can't do more than apologize.

THEODORE.

[*Sitting.*] Tsch! Hold your tongue.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Sitting beside him.*] No, but you could let *her* go for *you,* though; *that* could be fixed up. I'd even consent to be dragged into the case myself, if it would help matters forward; and goodness knows I've no ambition to appear in the Divorce Court again—I hate the hole. [*Coaxingly.*] You *will* consider it, won't you?

THEODORE.

Consider *what*?

MRS. ANNERLY.

Marrying me. Just say you'll consider it and I won't tease you any more to-day. You do owe me something, you know.

THEODORE.

Owe you——?

MRS. ANNERLY.

Well, you *have* compromised me by being seen about with me at different places lately; now, haven't you? [THEODORE *throws his head back and laughs boisterously.*] There's nothing to laugh at. Perhaps I haven't a shred of character left, in your estimation!

THEODORE.

Ho, ho!

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Rising, piqued.*] I presume you think I'm a person who'll accept a dinner at a restaurant from any man who holds up a finger to me!

THEODORE.

Why, my dear girl, you were always bothering me to take you to the cook-shops.

MRS. ANNERLY.

Bothering! [*Going to the chair on the right of the fireplace and gathering up her scarf.*] Oh, you're too rude!

THEODORE.

I was perfectly content with our quiet little meals here or in Egerton Crescent.

MRS. ANNERLY.

Yes, and to bore me to tears!

THEODORE.

Bore——?

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Winding her scarf round her shoulders.*] Bore, bore, bore!

THEODORE.

[*Scowling.*] Oh, I—I bored you, did I?

MRS. ANNERLY.

Talking to me, as you used to, like a sentimental young fellow of five-and-twenty! Ridiculous! [*Picking up her gloves.*] I want a taxi-cab.

THEODORE.

[*Rising.*] Stop—stop——

MRS. ANNERLY.

I've had quite sufficient of you for to-day.

THEODORE.

[*With a set jaw.*] I've glad you've brought matters to a head, Ally. I've something to propose to you.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Pulling on a glove.*] I've no desire to hear it.

THEODORE.

Something that's been on my mind for—oh, a month or more.

MRS. ANNERLY.

You can keep it to yourself. I'm not accustomed to being jeered at.

THEODORE.

[*Slowly walking over to the right.*] I'm sorry if I've hurt your feelings——

MRS. ANNERLY.

It's the first time I've ever made advances to a man, and I assure you it'll be the last.

THEODORE.

Ally——

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Moving towards the double-door.*] Cole will get me a Taxi.

THEODORE.

[*Authoritatively.*] Come here; come here; come here.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Halting behind the settee on the left, with a twist of her body.*] I shall not.

THEODORE.

[*Snapping his finger and thumb.*] Ally—[*She approaches him with assumed reluctance.*] Ally—[*deliberately*] what'll you take?

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Elevating her brows.*] Take?

THEODORE.

To put an end to this.

MRS. ANNERLY.

An end!

THEODORE.

To end your boredom—and mine; terminate our—friendship.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Uncomfortably.*] Oh, you—you needn't cut up as rough as all this.

THEODORE.

Ah, no, no, no; I'm not angry. I'm in earnest, though. Come! What'll satisfy you? [*She curls her lip fretfully.*] A man of my years deserves to pay heavily at this game. What'll make you easy and comfortable for a bit? I'll be liberal with you, my dear, and—[*offering his hand*] shake hands—[*she turns her shoulder to him*] shake hands—[*she gives him her hand sulkily*] and I—I'll ask you to forgive me——

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Withdrawing her hand.*] Oh, for goodness' sake, don't let's have any more of *that.* [*Contemptuously.*] You elderlies always wind up in the same way.

[*He seats himself at the writing-table and, unlocking a drawer, produces his cheque-book.*

THEODORE.

Would a couple of thousand be of any service to you?

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Opening her eyes widely.*] A couple of——!

THEODORE.

[*Preparing to write.*] I mean it.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Breathlessly.*] You don't! [*He writes.*] Why, of course it would. [*Melting completely.*] Oh, but it's too much; it is positively. I *couldn't.* And I've had such a lot

out of you already. You *are* generous. [*Behind his chair.*] Fancy my being huffy with you just now! [*Bending over him and arresting his pen.*] Boy dear——

THEODORE.

Hey?

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*In a whisper.*] Make it—three—will you? [*He looks at her over his shoulder with a cynical smile. She retreats.*] Oh, well! One isn't young and attractive for ever, you know.

[*He finishes writing the cheque and, having locked up his cheque-book methodically, rises and comes to her.*

THEODORE.

[*Giving her the cheque.*] There you are.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Examining it.*] You—you've split the difference! You *are* kind. I didn't expect it in the least. [*Folding the cheque neatly and finding a place for it in her bosom.*] I *am* ashamed of myself for hinting so broadly. Thanks, a hundred times. [*Blinking at him.*] Sha'n't I miss you!

[COLE *enters at the double-door followed by* PETER.

COLE.

Mr. Mottram.

THEODORE.

[*Greeting* PETER *at the fireplace as* COLE *retires.*] Hallo!

PETER.

Hallo! [*Bowing to* MRS. ANNERLY.] How d'ye do?

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Who has moved over to the right—distantly.*] How do you do?

THEODORE.

[*To* MRS. ANNERLY.] By-the-bye, did you say you want a taxi-cab?

MRS. ANNERLY.

If I'm not troubling you.

[THEODORE *goes out at the double-door, closing it upon* PETER *and* MRS. ANNERLY. *There is a pause.* MRS. ANNERLY, *pulling on her second glove, looks out of the window;* PETER *whistles silently.*

PETER.

[*After a while.*] Fine afternoon.

MRS. ANNERLY.

Delightful. [*After another pause, turning to him.*] Er —h'm—how do you think he's looking?

PETER.

Blundell? Seen him looking better.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*With a sigh.*] Ah! [*In a mincing voice, approaching* PETER.] Mr. Mottram, will you excuse me for offering a suggestion?

PETER.

[*Politely.*] Fire away.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Sweetly.*] Why don't you use your endeavours to bring Blundell and his wife together again?

PETER.

[*Staring at her.*] Eh?

MRS. ANNERLY.

It would be *such* a good thing, wouldn't it?

PETER.

I agree with you; it would indeed.

MRS. ANNERLY.

I've done all *I* can to persuade him. [PETER'S *eyes open wider and wider. She busies herself daintily with her glove.*] And now, as he and I are breaking off with one another——

PETER.

[*Quickly.*] I beg pardon?

MRS. ANNERLY.

Perhaps *you'll* take on the job—see what *you* can do.

PETER.

Breaking-off——?

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Loftily.*] Yes; I can't stand the annoyance any longer.

PETER.

Annoyance?

MRS. ANNERLY.

People are so spiteful. It's shocking—the ill-natured construction they put upon the most harmless little friendly acts! I admit I'm rather a careless woman—haven't I suffered from it!——

PETER.

[*Delicately.*] Then, do I happen—may I ask—to be assistin' at the grand *finale*——?

MRS. ANNERLY.

Certainly—[*with sudden mistrust.*] Don't you try to pull my leg, Mr. Mottram, please.

[*She draws her skirt aside and passes him haughtily as* THEODORE *returns. Then she goes out, followed by*

THEODORE, *who closes the door; whereupon* PETER *skips to the piano, seats himself at it, and strikes up a lively air. Presently* THEODORE *reappears, shuts the door again, and resumes mixing his whiskey-and-soda.*

THEODORE.

Ouf! [PETER *takes his hands from the keyboard.*] That's over.

PETER.

[*Innocently.*] Over?

THEODORE.

You've seen the last of that lady, as far as I'm concerned. [*He comes forward, carrying his tumbler, as* PETER *rises.*] What d'ye think? [*Grinning.*] She's been at me to marry her.

PETER.

[*Startled.*] Not really!

THEODORE.

To get rid of—present ties, and marry her.

PETER.

When—when did she——?

THEODORE.

Just now—five minutes ago. [*Struck by an odd expression in* PETER'S *face.*] Why, has she been saying anything——?

PETER.

[*Soberly.*] No, no; not a word.

THEODORE.

Poor little devil! [*He sits upon the settee on the left and drinks.*] Poor—silly—little devil!

PETER.

[*Coming to him.*] And so you took the opportunity of —er—? [THEODORE *nods.*] Just so.

THEODORE.

Ha! I expect I shall hear from her from time to time.

PETER.

Till the end o' your life. [*Another nod from* THEODORE.] Or hers. And the nearer the end the oftener you'll hear.

THEODORE.

Well, she shall have a trifle whenever she wants it. [*Looking at* PETER.] That's the least we can do, ol' man.

PETER.

Decidedly. That's the least we can do.

THEODORE.

[*Emptying his tumbler and jumping up.*] Ugh! [*Placing the glass upon the table at the end of the settee.*] I'll burn some pastilles here later on. [*Confronting* PETER.] Yes, you can have your crow; you're entitled to it.

PETER.

Crow?

THEODORE.

Your crow over me. Everything's turned out as you predicted.

PETER.

[*Demurely.*] Did *I*——?

THEODORE.

You know you did. "It's when the sun's working round to the west—" I often recall your damned words——

PETER.

Ah, that day——

THEODORE.

The day I left Lancaster Gate. "It's when men are where we are now—" you remember?—"it's when men are where we are now that they're most liable to fall into mischief." [*Walking away.*] God! the idiot I've made of myself!

[*He goes to the fireplace and leans upon the mantelpiece.*

PETER.

[*Quietly.*] Theo——

THEODORE.

H'm?

PETER.

[*Moving to the settee on the left.*] Talkin' of Lancaster Gate—I've got a bit o' noos for you. [*Sitting upon the settee.*] She's home. [*There is no response from* THEODORE.] Zoe I'm speakin' of. She's home.

THEODORE.

[*Leaving the fireplace.*] Thank'ee; I know.

PETER.

You know?

THEODORE.

I was there on Monday.

PETER.

[*Surprised.*] There?

THEODORE.

Passing the house.

PETER.

Signs o' life in the winders?

THEODORE.

[*Nodding.*] H'm. [*Coming forward.*] You've seen her?

PETER.

This mornin'.

THEODORE.

[*Simply.*] *I* was there again this morning.

PETER.

Passin' the house?

THEODORE.

[*Nodding.*] H'm.

PETER.

You seem to take a great deal of exercise in that locality.

THEODORE.

[*Forcing a laugh.*] Ha, ha! [*Drearily.*] Well, one had good times there as well as bad; and when one views it all from a distance——

PETER.

The good times stand out?

[*Without replying,* THEODORE *turns from* PETER *and sits upon the settee on the right.*

THEODORE.

[*After a pause.*] How—how did you find her?

PETER.

She ain't up to much.

THEODORE.

What's——?

PETER.

Chill.

THEODORE.

Doctor? [PETER *nods.*] Rashleigh?

PETER.

That's the feller. Oh, it's nothin' serious.

THEODORE.

Chill? Ha! I'll be bound she caught it through doing something foolish. [*Fidgeting with his hands.*] She has nobody to look after her—nobody to look after her.

PETER.

Her maid——

THEODORE.

Lena? Is Lena still with her? [*A nod from* PETER.] I'm glad Lena's still with her. Lena's fond of her. [*Starting up and pacing the room.*] Not that Lena can control her; a maid hasn't any authority. [*Stopping before* PETER.] She isn't *very* poorly?

PETER.

No, no. A little pulled down; that's all. And as charmin' as ever. [THEODORE *walks away and, with his hands in his pockets, gazes out of the window.*] She ain't sleepin'; that's the real bother.

THEODORE.

Not sleeping?

PETER.

Walks her room half the night and consooms too many cigarettes.

THEODORE.

Why?

PETER.

I can only give you my impression——

THEODORE.

[*Impatiently.*] Well?

PETER.

My dear chap, d'ye think that *she* don't recollect the happy times as well as the bad 'uns? Ain't *she* viewin' it all from a distance, as you are; [*rising*] and don't the good times stand out in *her* mind as they do in yours? [*Approaching* THEODORE.] Theo——

THEODORE.

H'm?

PETER.

I had a long confab with her this mornin'.

THEODORE.

What about?

PETER.

The possibility of a—a reconciliation.

[*There is a pause and then* THEODORE *turns to* PETER.

THEODORE.

[*In a husky voice.*] Ho! So that's what you're after, is it?

PETER.

Yes; and I'm bent on carryin' it through.

THEODORE.

You—you meddlesome old buffer!

PETER.

[*Chuckling.*] Ha, ha!

THEODORE.

How—how did she take it?

PETER.

In a way that convinced me you've only to assure her that your old feelin's for her have returned, and in spite of everythin'——

THEODORE.

Everything! Wait till she hears of sweet Alice.

PETER.

Wait!

THEODORE.

[*Looking at* PETER.] Why, d'ye mean——?

PETER.

Oh, yes; it's got to her.

THEODORE.

[*Dully.*] Already?

PETER.

Jim Mallandain travelled with her from Paris on Sunday.

THEODORE.

Did *he*——?

PETER.

I suppose he thought it 'ud amuse her.

THEODORE.

The skunk!

PETER.

If it hadn't been Jim, it 'ud have been somebody else.

THEODORE.

[*Thickly.*] You're right; somebody had to be first.

PETER.

However, I did my best for yer.

THEODORE.

Denied it?

PETER.

Warmly. I defended you and the young lady with all the eloquence I could command.

THEODORE.

Zoe didn't believe you? [*A pause.*] She didn't believe you? [PETER *shrugs his shoulders.*] Of course she didn't. [*Passing* PETER *and walking about the room.*] What did she say? Hey? Oh, I can guess; you needn't tell me. What's everybody saying? Peter, I'd give half as much as I'm worth to wipe the Annerly incident off my slate. I would, on the nail. Just fancy! To reach my age—and to be of decent repute—and then to have your name linked with a brainless, mercenary little trull like Alice Annerly! Ha, ha! Glorious fun for 'em in the City, and at the club! *You* hear it all. Confound you, can't you open your mouth! Ho! *Of course* Zoe sums it all up; she's cute enough when she chooses. [*Sitting upon the settee on the left and mopping his face and throat with his handkerchief.*] How did it end?

PETER.

End?

THEODORE.

Your chat with my missus.

PETER.

It ended in my urgin' her to consider the matter—think it over. [*Coming to him.*] I'm dinin' with her next week. [*Sitting in the chair at the further end of the settee.*] If you'll authorize me to open negotiations with her on your behalf——

THEODORE.

I—I approach her!

PETER.

Cert'nly.

THEODORE.

[*Twisting his handkerchief into a rope.*] No—no——

PETER.

Why not?

THEODORE.

A couple o' months back I could have done it. Even as late as a fortnight ago—before I'd given myself away by showing myself in public with Alice—it might have been feasible. [*Between his teeth.*] But now—when I—when I've lost any remnant of claim I may have had—on her respect——!

PETER.

[*In his judicial manner.*] My dear chap, here is a case——

THEODORE.

Hell with you and your case! [*Jumping up and walking away to the right.*] I couldn't screw myself up to it; I—I couldn't humble myself to that extent. [*Moving about.*] Ho! How she'd grin! She's got a cruel sense o' humour, Peter—or had once. You see, I always posed to her as being a *strong,* rather cold-blooded man——

PETER.

A favourite pose, that, of husbands.

THEODORE.

It was more than a pose—I thought I *was* a strong man. And then—to crawl back to her—all over mud——!

[*He halts in the middle of the room and, with a shaky hand, produces his cigar-case from his pocket and takes out a cigar.*

PETER.

I was about to remark, when you chipped in with your usual politeness—I was about to remark that this is a case where *two persons* have behaved more or less stoopidly.

THEODORE.

Two——?

PETER.

You more, she less.

THEODORE.

[*His brow darkening.*] You—you're referring to——?

PETER.

Er—Mrs. Zoe——

THEODORE.

[*Cutting his cigar viciously.*] With—Ferris.

PETER.

Yes; and I think that the friend of both parties—the individual on whose shoulders the task of adjustin' matters would fall—[*rising*] I think that that friend might manage to impose a condition which 'ud be greatly to your advantage.

THEODORE.

Condition?

PETER.

No imputations to be made on either side.

THEODORE.

[*Broodingly.*] No—imputations——?

PETER.

Each party acceptin' the statement of the other party, and promisin' not to rake up anythin' that's occurred durin' the past four months.

THEODORE.

I—I understand.

PETER.

It 'ud help to save your face for the moment, and the healin' hand of time might be trusted to do the rest.

THEODORE.

[*Quietly.*] Peter——

PETER.

Hallo!

THEODORE.

When I was at the house on Monday—my wife's house—half-past eleven in the morning——

PETER.

Well?

THEODORE.

There was a yellow car at the door.

PETER.

Yaller car?

THEODORE.

I couldn't get near, but—that fellow has a yellow car.

PETER.

Has he?

THEODORE.

[*Grimly.*] Why, he's driven you in it.

PETER.

[*Carelessly.*] I'd forgotten.

THEODORE.

[*Looking at* PETER.] He's still hanging on to her skirts, hey?

PETER.

He's an ill-bred, tactless cub. But he's got a nice 'ead of 'air and smells o' soap; and that's the sort women love to have danglin' about after 'em.

THEODORE.

[*With an effort.*] There—there's nothing in it, Peter, beyond that?

PETER.

[*Waving his hand disdainfully.*] Good God!

THEODORE.

Oh, I know there isn't; I know there isn't. With all her faults, I know she's as straight as a die. [*Looking at* PETER *again.*] Did you touch on the subject with her?

PETER.

[*Nodding.*] I rubbed it in. I told her her conduct had been indiscreet to a degree. I thought it policy to rub it in.

THEODORE.

Did she—offer any explanation?

PETER.

[*Nodding.*] Pure thoughtlessness.

THEODORE.

And you felt that she was—speaking the truth?

PETER.

[*Testily.*] My dear Theodore——

THEODORE.

You swear that? [*Suddenly, grasping the lapel of* PETER'S *coat.*] Damn it, man, *you* began talking about the thing——!

[COLE *enters at the double-door carrying a note in the shape of a cocked-hat.*

THEODORE.

[*Angrily.*] What d'ye want?

COLE.

I beg your pardon, sir.

THEODORE.

[*Going to him.*] Hey?

[*He snatches the note from the man and, as he glances at the writing on it, his jaw drops.*

COLE.

[*In a low voice.*] An answer, sir.

THEODORE.

[*Trying to unfold the note.*] Messenger?

COLE.

The lady herself, I think, sir.

[*There is a pause, and then* THEODORE *slowly gets the note open and reads it.*

THEODORE.

[*To* COLE.] Where——?

COLE.

In the smoking-room, sir.

THEODORE.

Er—wait.

COLE.

Yessir.

[COLE *withdraws.*

THEODORE.

[*To* PETER, *who has wandered away.*] Peter——

[PETER *comes to him and* THEODORE *hands him the note.* PETER'S *eyes bolt as he recognizes the handwriting.*

PETER.

[*Reading the note.*] "Will you see me?" Short—[*examining both sides of the paper and then returning the note to* THEODORE] sweet.

THEODORE.

[*Chewing his unlighted cigar.*] This is your doing.

PETER.

[*Beaming.*] I flatter myself it must be. [*Laying a hand on* THEODORE'S *shoulder.*] My dear Theo, this puts a noo aspect on the affair—clears the air.

THEODORE.

New aspect——?

PETER.

She makes the first advances, dear kind soul as she is. [*A pause.*] Shall I—fetch her in?

THEODORE.

Hold hard, hold hard; don't be in such a devil of a hurry.

[*He leaves* PETER *and seats himself in a heap in the chair on the right of the fireplace.* PETER *moves softly to the double-door.*

PETER.

[*His hand on the door-handle—to* THEODORE.] *May* I?

[THEODORE *raises his head and nods.* PETER *goes out. As the door closes,* THEODORE *gets to his feet and flings his cigar into the grate. Then, hastily, he proceeds to put the room in order, closing the piano and beating out and rearranging the pillows on the settees. Finally, he comes upon* MRS. ANNERLY'S *empty coffee-cup, picks it up, and vanishes with it into the dining-room. After a little while, the double-door opens and* PETER *returns. He glances round the room, looks surprised at not finding* THEODORE *and, with a motion of the head, invites* ZOE *to enter. Presently she appears, beautifully dressed. She also looks round; and, passing* PETER, *she moves trembling to the fireplace. He closes the door and joins her.*

PETER.

[*To* ZOE.] You're a brick to do this.

ZOE.

[*Almost inaudibly.*] Am I?

PETER.

You'll never regret it.

ZOE.

[*Clutching* PETER'S *arm.*] He will be—kind to me?

PETER.

As kind as you are to him.

ZOE.

[*Drawing a deep breath.*] Ah! [*She sits upon the settee on the right and her eyes roam about the room.*] What a ripping flat!

PETER.

[*Disparagingly.*] Oh, I dun'no.

ZOE.

[*With a wry mouth, plaintively.*] He *has* been doing himself jolly well, in all conscience.

[*The dining-room door opens and* THEODORE *appears. He shuts the door and edges towards* PETER *who leads him to* ZOE.

PETER.

My dear old pals——

[ZOE *gets to her feet and* THEODORE *awkwardly holds out his hand to her.*

THEODORE.

How are you, Zoe?

ZOE.

Fairly—thanks——

[*She hurriedly produces her handkerchief from a gold bag hanging from her wrist and moves away to the left. There she sits upon the settee, struggling to*

command herself. PETER *gives* THEODORE'S *arm a friendly grip and makes for the double-door. As he passes behind the settee on which* ZOE *is seated, he stops to pat her shoulder.*

ZOE.

[*In a whisper, seizing his hand.*] Don't go, Peter; don't go.

[*He releases his hand, gives hers a reassuring squeeze, and goes to the door.*

PETER.

[*At the door, to* THEODORE.] I shall be in the City till six.

[*He departs. After a silence,* THEODORE *approaches* ZOE. *They carefully avoid meeting each other's eyes.*

THEODORE.

It—it's very good of you, Zo, to—to hunt me up.

ZOE.

I—I went first to Copthall Court. [*Wiping a tear from her cheek.*] I—I thought I should find you there.

THEODORE.

I—I haven't been at all regular at the office lately. [*A pause. They look about the room in opposite directions.*] Er—Peter tells me he had a little talk with you this morning.

ZOE.

Y-yes.

THEODORE.

About our—being reconciled.

ZOE.

Yes.

THEODORE.

W-well? [*She puts her handkerchief away and takes from her bag a torn envelope with some inclosures. She gives it to him timidly and he extracts from the envelope a letter and a key.*] The—the damned cruel letter I left behind me—that evening—with my latch-key. [*She inclines her head.*] May I—destroy it?

[*She nods assent, and he tears up the envelope and letter and crams the pieces into his trouser-pocket.*

THEODORE.

[*Looking at the key.*] The—the key——?

ZOE.

It—it's yours again—if you like.

THEODORE.

You—you're willing——? [*Again she inclines her head, and he puts the key into a pocket in his waistcoat and seats himself humbly in the chair at the further end of the settee.*] Thank'ee. [*After a pause.*] Zo——

ZOE.

Yes?

THEODORE.

[*Turning to her but not lifting his eyes.*] Look here. I'm not going to—try to deceive you. I—I want you to understand exactly what you're offering to take back.

ZOE.

Exactly——?

THEODORE.

I gather from Peter that you came over from Paris on Sunday in the company of Mr. Jim Mallandain.

ZOE.

I picked him up by chance at the Gare du Nord.

THEODORE.

And Mr. Jim whiled away the journey by—by gossiping to you about me and—a woman of the name of Annerly?

ZOE.

On the boat.

THEODORE.

Quite so. [*A pause.*] When you mentioned the matter to Peter, he produced the white-wash bucket, didn't he?

ZOE.

Slapped it on thick.

THEODORE.

[*Looking at her from under his brows.*] But you didn't——? [*She shakes her head.*] You're right; Peter's a liar. It's a true bill. I wish it wasn't; but it is.

ZOE.

[*After a pause, steadily.*] Well?

THEODORE.

[*Looking at her again.*] Are you prepared to forgive me that too, then? [*She nods, but with compressed lips. He bows his head.*] Anyhow, I'm easier for making a clean breast of it.

ZOE.

How—how did you—come to——?

THEODORE.

Lower myself with this hussy? [*Looking up.*] Isn't it all of a piece? Isn't it the natural finish of the mistakes of the last year or so—the errors we've committed since we began kicking each other's shins? [*Quickly.*] Oh, I'm not

reproaching you now for your share o' the transaction. It was my job—the husband's job—to be patient with you; to smooth you down gently, and to wait. But instead of doing that, I let my mind dwell on my own grievances; with the result that latterly the one being in the world I envied was the fellow who'd kept his liberty, or who'd had the pluck to knock off the shackles. [*Rising and walking about, gathering his thoughts as he proceeds.*] Well, I got my freedom at last, didn't I! And a nice mess I made of it. I started by taking a furnished lodging in St. James's Street—sky-high, quiet, *peaceful!* Ha! Hardly a fortnight was out before I had blue-devils and was groaning to myself at the very state of things I'd been longing for. Why should I be condemned, I said to myself—why should I be condemned to an infernal dull life while others round me were enjoying themselves like fighting-cocks! And just then this flat was offered to me as it stands; and in less than a month after I'd slammed the front-door at Lancaster Gate I was giving a dinner-party here—a house-warming——[*halting at the window, his back to* ZOE] a dinner-party to four-and-twenty people, and not all of 'em men.

ZOE.

[*In a low voice.*] I heard of your setting up here while I was—in Florence—[*clenching her hands*] in Florence.

THEODORE.

[*Resuming his walk.*] However, so far it was nothing but folly on my part—egregious folly. And so it continued till I—till I had the honour of being introduced to Mrs. Annerly at a supper at Jack Poncerot's. [*Eyeing* ZOE *askance.*] I won't give you the details of the pretty story; your imagination 'll supply those—the heading o' the chapters, at any rate. Chapter One, Conceit—I had the besotted vanity to fancy she—she liked me and was genuinely sympathetic towards me; [*at the mantelpiece, looking down into the*

grate] and so on to Chapter the Last—the chapter with the inevitable title—Disgust—Loathing—!

ZOE.

[*Thoughtfully.*] You—you're sure you've reached the—the final chapter?

THEODORE.

[*Turning to her.*] Heavens, yes! [*Shaking himself.*] It's all over. I've paid her off—to-day, as it happens. I've been itching to do it; and I've done it. [*Sitting upon the settee on the right.*] Another month of her society, and I believe I'd have gone to the dogs completely. [*His elbows on his knees, holding his head.*] Zo——

ZOE.

Eh?

THEODORE.

Peter says you're walking your room half the night and smoking your nerves raw.

ZOE.

Does he? He needn't have repeated——

THEODORE.

Zo, I've been walking this horrible flat in the same way. *I* can't get to bed till I hear the rattle of the milk-carts. And *I'm* smoking too much—and—not only *that*——

ZOE.

[*Looking at him for the first time.*] Not only *what?*

THEODORE.

Well, a man doesn't smoke till four or five o'clock in the morning on cocoa, does he?

[*There is a moment's silence, and then she rises and goes to him.*

ZOE.

Oh—Theo——!

THEODORE.

[*Looking up at her.*] So your liberty hasn't made you over happy, either, has it, old girl?

ZOE.

[*Faintly.*] No.

THEODORE.

You've been thinking, too, of the good times we've had together, hey?

ZOE.

Y-yes. [*He rises and places his hands upon her shoulders yearningly as if about to draw her to him. She shrinks from him with a startled look.*] Theo——

THEODORE.

[*Dropping his hands.*] What?

ZOE.

[*Nervously.*] There—there's one thing I—I want to say to you—before we—before we go further——

THEODORE.

[*Feeling the rebuff.*] H'm?

ZOE.

As I've told you, I'm willing that you should return to Lancaster Gate. You may return as soon as you please; but——

THEODORE.

But?

ZOE.

It must be—simply as a companion, Theo; a friend.

THEODORE.

[*Stiffly.*] A friend?

ZOE.

[*With a slight shrug.*] Not that we've been much else to each other these last few years—except enemies. Still——

THEODORE.

[*Frowning.*] You wish to make it perfectly clear.

ZOE.

Yes.

THEODORE.

[*After a pause, icily.*] I beg your pardon. I was forgetting myself just now. Thanks for the reminder. [*Walking away from her.*] Oh, I know you can feel only the most utter contempt for me—wholesale contempt.

ZOE.

[*Entreatingly.*] Ah, no; don't take that tone.

THEODORE.

Stand the naughty boy in the corner; he's earned any amount of humiliation you choose to inflict.

ZOE.

You shall never be humiliated by me, Theo.

THEODORE.

[*Throwing himself upon the settee on the left.*] Evidently!

ZOE.

[*Turning away.*] Oh, for God's sake, don't let's begin fighting again; [*sitting on the settee on the right*] don't let's do that.

THEODORE.

Ha, ha! No, no; we won't squabble. Right you are; I accept the terms—*any* terms. [*Lying at full length upon his back on the settee.*] As you say, we've been little more than

friends of late years—good friends or bad. [*Throwing one leg over the other.*] It's your laying down the law so emphatically that riled me. Sorry I growled. [*There is silence between them. She watches him guiltily. Suddenly he changes the position of his legs.*] Zo——

ZOE.

Yes?

THEODORE.

[*Gazing at the ceiling.*] At the same time, I'm blessed if I wouldn't rather you wanted to tear my eyes out than that you should treat me in this lofty, condescending style—scratch my face and tear my eyes out.

ZOE.

Well, I—I don't, you see.

THEODORE.

[*Smiling unpleasantly.*] Alice Annerly's an extremely handsome creature, my dear, whatever else she may be.

ZOE.

I'm—I'm sure of it.

THEODORE.

Her photo's on the top of the piano.

ZOE.

[*Restraining an impulse to glance over her shoulder.*] I—I'm not curious.

THEODORE.

Ho! You mayn't be aware of the fact, but I've paid you the compliment of resenting the deep devotion your pet poodle—Master Lenny Ferris—has been paying you recently. You might do me a similar honour. [*Meditatively.*] Master —blooming—Lenny! [*Again there is a pause; and then, slowly, he turns upon his side so that he may face her.*] I

say, that was a pretty disgraceful business—your trapesing about Italy with that fellow. [*Another pause.*] Hey?

ZOE.

[*Holding her breath.*] It *was*—unwise of me, I own.

THEODORE.

Unwise! Peter and I were discussing it when your note was brought in.

ZOE.

[*Moistening her lips.*] Were you?

THEODORE.

[*Harshly.*] Yes, we were. [*Another pause.*] My God, I think it's *I* who ought to dictate what our domestic arrangements are to be in the future—not you! [*A pause. With a motion of the head, he invites her to come to him.*] Zoe—. [*A pause.*] Don't you hear me!

[*She hesitates; then she nerves herself and rises and, with a light step, crosses the room.*

ZOE.

[*Resting her arms on the back of the chair at the further end of the settee on which he is lying.*] Still the same dear old bully, I notice.

THEODORE.

Sit down.

ZOE.

Your gentle voice is quite audible where I am.

THEODORE.

[*Putting his feet to the ground.*] You sit down a minute.

ZOE.

Puh!

[*She sits haughtily.*

THEODORE.

Now, you look here, my lady; I should like an account of that Italian affair from the word go.

ZOE.

I'm not in the mood to furnish it.

THEODORE.

Perhaps not; but I'm in the mood to receive it. [*A pause.*] When did he join you?

ZOE.

He—he didn't join me; that's not the way to put it.

THEODORE.

Put it any way you like. When was it?

ZOE.

At the—end of February, I think.

THEODORE.

You think! [*A pause.*] What made him go out to you?

ZOE.

He knew I was awfully in the dumps——

THEODORE.

Did he? How did he know that?

ZOE.

He—guessed I must be.

THEODORE.

Guessed!

ZOE.

Well, I'd seen him before I went away. I *was* dreadfully depressed, Theo—dreadfully *désolée*. I never thought you'd bang out of the house as you did. I never meant, for a single moment——

THEODORE.

Where were you when he turned up?

ZOE.

I—I'd got to Florence. I'd been to Genoa and Pisa—I was drifting about——

THEODORE.

Did he dream you were in Florence?

ZOE.

Dream——?

THEODORE.

He *must* have dreamt it.

ZOE.

Oh, I see what you're driving at. He—he'd had a post-card from me——

THEODORE.

A post-card!

ZOE.

[*Feebly.*] I—I don't mean *one*—you—you silly! I—I sent him a picture from each town—so I did to Peter——

THEODORE.

Why don't you admit that you and Ferris were corresponding?

ZOE.

I—I am admitting it. It's nothing to admit.

THEODORE.

Isn't it? [*A pause.*] Well, he arrives in Florence——?

ZOE.

Don't worry me this afternoon, Theo——

THEODORE.

How long was he with you in Florence?

ZOE.

I'm seedy; I had quite a temperature yesterday. Lena called in Rashleigh——

THEODORE.

How long was he with you in Florence?

ZOE.

He wasn't "with" me.

THEODORE.

How long?

ZOE.

A week—eight days——

THEODORE.

Same hotel?

ZOE.

No, no, no!

THEODORE.

And afterwards——?

ZOE.

I wanted to do a little tour of the quiet old places—Perugia—Siena——

THEODORE.

So did *he,* hey?

ZOE.

He tacked on. I saw no harm in it at the time.

THEODORE.

At the time!

ZOE.

Nor do I now.

THEODORE.

It was coming from Perugia you fell up against Lowenstein.

ZOE.

If you were a man you'd thrash that beast.

THEODORE.

Lowenstein had the room at the hotel there—the Brufani —that Ferris had had.

ZOE.

[*Protestingly.*] Ah——!

THEODORE.

In the same corridor as yours was.

ZOE.

It was stupid—stupid—stupid of Lenny to let them carry his bag up to the Brufani. It was all done before—before it dawned on him——

THEODORE.

Where were you moving on to when Lowenstein met you at Arezzo? [*A pause.*] Hey?

ZOE.

[*Passing her hand across her brow, weakly.*] Let me off to-day, Theo; my head's going like a clock. [*Getting to her feet.*] Take it up again another time. [*She goes to the settee on the right and picks up her bag which she has left there. He rises and follows her, so that when she turns they come face to face. She steadies herself.*] Well, you turn it over in your mind about coming back to me. I don't want to put pressure on you; only I—I understood from Peter you were feeling kindly towards me again.

THEODORE.

[*Quietly.*] When did you see Ferris last?

ZOE.

Oh, drop Ferris.

THEODORE.

When?

ZOE.

Oh—over two months ago—at the end of the little jaunt.

THEODORE.

Not since? [*She looks at him vacantly and shakes her head.*] That's a lie. He was with you on Monday morning at half-past eleven. D'ye deny it?

ZOE.

You—you're so jealous, one—one's afraid——

THEODORE.

[*With sudden, fierce earnestness.*] Zoe——

ZOE.

[*Helplessly.*] I'm not going to remain here to be——

THEODORE.

Give me your word nothing wrong's occurred between you and Ferris. [*A pause.*] I don't ask for your oath; I'll be satisfied with your word. [*A pause.*] Give me your word.

[*She sits upon the settee, her hands lying in her lap.*

ZOE.

[*Staring at him.*] Theo—I've forgiven you; forgive *me.*

[*There is a silence and then, dumbfoundered, he moves to the chair at the further end of the settee on the left and sits there.*

THEODORE.

[*After a while.*] Florence?

ZOE.

No. Perugia—Siena—[*Brokenly.*] It was in Florence I first lost my senses. I'd been pitying you, hating myself

for the way I'd served you, and had been trying to concoct a letter to you. And then one arrived from *him,* telling me you'd taken this big flat and were having a splendid time. It made me furious; and when he came through to me, I was half beside myself. And then he planned out the little tour, and I said Yes to it. [*Wringing her hands.*] Why! Why did I fall in with it! I shall never know why—except that I was mad—blind mad——! [*Leaning back, her eyes closed.*] Get me a drop o' water.

[*He rouses himself and goes to the table on the left of the fireplace and half-fills a tumbler with soda-water. Then he brings her the tumbler and holds it out to her.*

THEODORE.

Here——

ZOE.

[*Opening her eyes and looking up at him beseechingly.*] Be—merciful to me.

THEODORE.

[*Peremptorily.*] Take it.

ZOE.

[*Barely touching the glass.*] Don't—don't be hard on me, old man.

[*He thrusts the tumbler into her hand and she drinks.*

THEODORE.

[*Heavily.*] I—I must have some advice about this—some advice.

ZOE.

Advice? [*He goes to the writing-table, sits there, and places the telephone-receiver to his ear.*] You—you won't do anything to disgrace me publicly, will you, Theo? [*He taps the arm of the instrument impatiently.*] You won't do anything spiteful? [*He rings again.*] You and I are both sinners, Theo; we've both gone a mucker.

THEODORE.

[*Speaking into the telephone.*] London Wall, one, three, double five, eight.

ZOE.

That's Peter. *He* won't advise you to do anything spiteful. [*She rises painfully, puts the tumbler on the top of the piano, and walks about the room.*] What *can* you do? You can do nothing to hurt me; nor I you. We're both sinners.

THEODORE.

[*Into the telephone.*] Hallo! . . . Are you Blundell, Slade and Mottram? . . . Is that Mr. Ewart? . . . Mr. Blundell. . . . Mr. Mottram not back yet, I suppose? . . .

ZOE.

[*In a murmur.*] Both—both gone a mucker.

THEODORE.

[*Into the telephone.*] . . . When he comes in, tell him I want to see him at once. . . . Cavendish Square . . . at once. . . . [*Replacing the receiver.*] Good-bye.

ZOE.

[*On the left.*] Peter—Peter won't let you—be too rough on me.

THEODORE.

[*Leaning his head on his hands.*] Ho, ho! An eye-opener for Peter! But he's been a first-rate prophet all the same. [*In a muffled voice.*] Yes, Peter's been right all along the line, with his precious mid-Channel!

ZOE.

[*Looking at him and speaking in low, measured tones.*] Theo—— [*He makes no response.*] Theo—— [*Coming to him slowly.*] I—I was thinking it over—beating it all

out—driving into the City and back again. *Our* marriage was doomed long, long before we reached mid-Channel.

THEODORE.

[*Absently, not stirring.*] Oh?

ZOE.

It was doomed nearly fourteen years ago.

THEODORE.

[*As before.*] Oh?

ZOE.

From the very beginning.

THEODORE.

[*Raising his head.*] What d'ye——?

ZOE.

It was doomed from the moment we agreed that we'd never be encumbered in our career with any—brats of children. [*He partly turns in his chair, to listen to her.*] I want you to remember that bargain, in judging me; and I want you to tell Peter of it.

THEODORE.

Yes, it suits you to rake that up now——

ZOE.

[*Pressing her fingers to her temples.*] If there had been "brats of children" at home, it would have made a different woman of me, Theo; such a different woman of me—and a different man of you. But, no; everything in the earlier years of our marriage was sacrificed to coining money—to shoving our way through the crowd—to "getting on"; everything was sacrificed to that.

THEODORE.

[*Angrily.*] Oh——!

ZOE.

And then, when we had succeeded—when we had *got* on—we had commenced to draw apart from each other; and there was the great, showy, empty house at Lancaster Gate for me to fret and pine in. [*He waves his arms scornfully.*] Oh, yes, we were happy in those climbing days—greedily, feverishly happy; but we didn't look to the time when we should need another interest in life to bind us together—the time when we'd got on in years as well as in position. [THEODORE *starts up.*] Ah, Theo, I believe we should have crossed that Ridge safely enough [*laying her hands upon his breast*] but for our cursed, cursed selfishness——!

THEODORE.

[*Shaking himself free.*] Well, there's not the slightest use in talking about what might, or might not, have been. [*Passing her and pacing the room.*] One thing is absolutely certain—it's impossible for us ever to live under the same roof again under *any* conditions. That's out o' the question; I couldn't stoop to that.

ZOE.

[*Leaning against the chair at the writing-table.*] No, you draw the line at stooping to Mrs. Annerly.

THEODORE.

Oh, don't keep on harping on that string. The cases are as far apart as the poles.

ZOE.

[*Faintly.*] Ha, ha!

THEODORE.

[*Halting in the middle of the room and drumming upon his brow with his fingers.*] Of course, we can make our separation a legal one; but that wouldn't give us release. And as long as we're tied to one another—[*abruptly, looking at her.*] Zoe——

ZOE.

[*Meekly.*] Eh?

THEODORE.

If I allowed you to divorce me—made it easy for you—would Ferris—would that scoundrel marry you?

ZOE.

[*Turning to him, blankly.*] M-marry me?

THEODORE.

Because—if it 'ud save you from going utterly to the bad——

ZOE.

[*Advancing a step or two.*] No, no; I wouldn't—I wouldn't marry Lenny.

THEODORE.

[*After a moment's pause, sharply.*] You wouldn't?

ZOE.

No—no——

THEODORE.

[*Coming close to her.*] Why not? [*She shrugs her shoulders confusedly.*] Why not?

[*She wavers, then grasps his arm. Again he shakes her off.*

ZOE.

[*Appealingly.*] Oh, Theo, stick to me. Don't throw me over. Wait—wait for Peter. Theo, I've never ceased to be fond of you——

THEODORE.

Faugh!

ZOE.

Not at the bottom of my heart. No, nor you of me; there's the tragedy of it. Peter says the same. [*Seizing his hand.*] Take time; don't decide to-day——

THEODORE.

[*Freeing his hand and looking at her piercingly.*] When did you see him last?

ZOE.

H-him?

THEODORE.

Ferris.

ZOE.

This—this morning.

THEODORE.

This morning!

ZOE.

I—I confess—this morning. I—I sent him away.

THEODORE.

Sent him—away?

ZOE.

[*Nodding.*] Yes—yes——

THEODORE.

[*Slowly.*] And so you rush off to me—straight from the young gentleman——

ZOE.

W-well?

THEODORE.

[*Suddenly.*] Why, damn you, you've quarrelled!

ZOE.

No——

THEODORE.

He's chucked you——!

ZOE.

No——

THEODORE.

Had enough of you!

ZOE.

[*Her eyes blazing.*] That's not true!

THEODORE.

Ho, ho! You bring me his cast-off trash, do you——!

ZOE.

It's a lie!

THEODORE.

Mr. Lenny Ferris's leavings!

ZOE.

It's a lie! He'd give his soul to make me his wife.

THEODORE.

Will he tell *me* that?

ZOE.

Tell *you*!

THEODORE.

[*Between his teeth.*] If he doesn't, I'll break every bone in his carcase.

ZOE.

[*Throwing her head up defiantly.*] Of course he'd tell you.

THEODORE.

[*Walking away to the fireplace.*] He shall have a chance of doing it.

ZOE.

[*Making for the door, wildly.*] The sooner the better!

THEODORE.

[*Looking at his watch.*] If Peter were here——

ZOE.

[*Behind the settee on the left, turning to* THEODORE.] Mind! I've your bond! If Lenny promises to marry me, you'll let me free myself from you?

THEODORE.

I've said so.

ZOE.

[*Missing her bag, which is again lying upon the settee on the left, and pointing to it.*] Please——

[*He picks up the bag, and is about to take it to her, when he remembers that he has the latch-key in his pocket. He produces the key and drops it into the bag.*

THEODORE.

[*As he does so.*] You'll want this for your *new* husband.

ZOE.

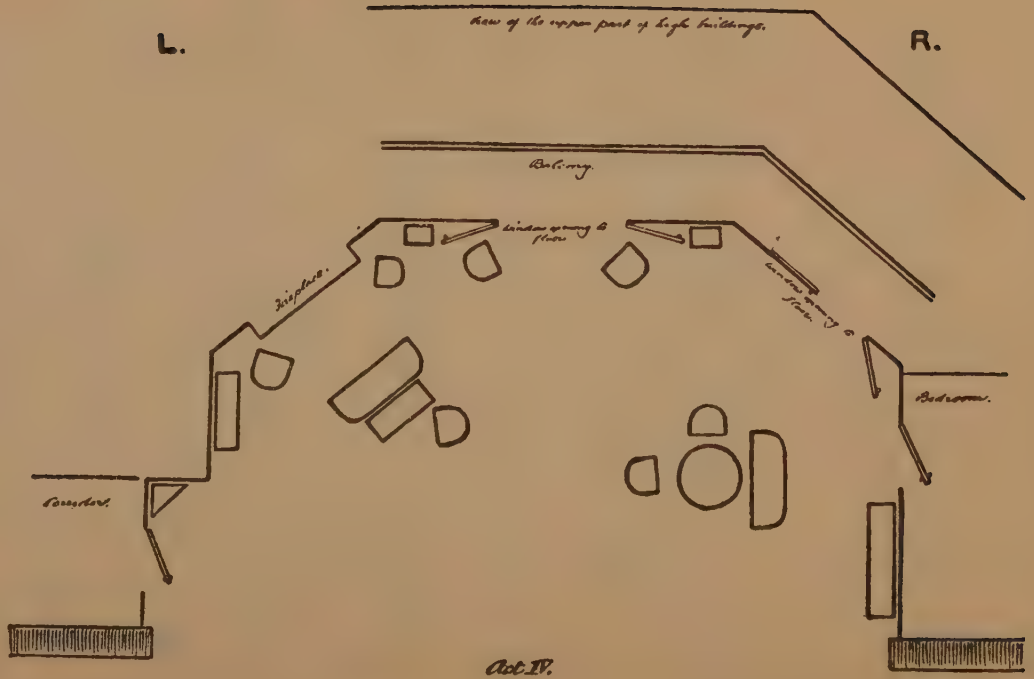
Thank God, I've done with the old one! [*He tosses the bag to her in a fury and she catches it.*] Ha, ha! [*At the door.*] Ta, ta! [*She disappears.*

THEODORE.

[*Flourishing his hands.*] Oh——!

[*Going to the piano, he takes the decanter of brandy and a glass from the tray and fills the glass to the brim.*

END OF THE THIRD ACT



Act IV.

THE FOURTH ACT

The scene is a pretty, irregularly-shaped room, simply but tastefully furnished. At the back, facing the spectator, are two double-windows opening to the floor. These windows give on to a balcony which appears to continue its course outside the adjoining rooms both on the right and left. Beyond the balcony there is an open space and, in the distance, a view of the upper part of the Albert Hall and of other lofty buildings. On the left is the fireplace—its grate empty, save for a few pots of flowers—and, nearer the spectator, there is a door opening from a corridor. Opposite this door is a door of like dimensions, admitting to a bedroom.

One either side of the fireplace and of the left-hand window there is an arm-chair; facing the fireplace there is a settee; and at the back of the settee are a small writing-table and writing-chair. A leathern tub for waste-paper stands beside the writing-table.

On the right of the room is a round table upon which tea is laid for three persons. Two chairs—one on the left, another at the further side—and a settee on the right are drawn up close to this table. Elsewhere are a book-case, a smoking-cabinet, and some odds and ends of furniture—the whole being characteristic of a room in a small flat occupied by a well-to-do, but not wealthy, young man.

Both the windows are open, and the glare of the afternoon sun is on the balcony and the opposite buildings.

[MRS. PIERPOINT, ETHEL, *and* LEONARD—*the ladies in their hats and gaily dressed—are seated at the round table.*

LEONARD.

[*In the chair on the left of the table—handing a dish of cakes to* MRS. PIERPOINT.] Do try one of these little cakes.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*In the chair at the further side of the table.*] I couldn't.

LEONARD.

I bought them and carried 'em home myself.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

You really must excuse me.

LEONARD.

[*Pushing the dish towards* ETHEL, *who is on the settee facing him.*] Buck up, Ethel.

ETHEL.

Good-bye to my dinner, then. [*Taking a cake and biting it as she speaks.*] May I, mother?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Cheerfully.*] Now, isn't that the modern young lady exactly! May I, mother! And the cake is half eaten before the poor mother can even nod her head.

ETHEL.

[*Laughing.*] Ha, ha!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

May I go out for a walk, mother; and the front door bangs on the very words! May I do this; may I do that! And a nice life the mother leads if she dares to say No.

ETHEL.

This sounds suspiciously like a sermon. [*To* LEONARD.] Lenny, sit up straight and be preached to. [*Pushing her cup to* MRS. PIERPOINT *who has the tea-tray before her.*] Another cup of tea, your reverence.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Ethel! How—how irreligious! [*Pouring out tea.*] Ah, but it's true, every syllable of it. And in nothing is this spirit of—what shall I describe it as?——

ETHEL.

Go-as-you-pleasédness.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Giving* ETHEL *her tea.*] In nothing is this wilful, thoughtless spirit more plainly shown than in the way love-affairs are conducted at the present day.

ETHEL.

[*Whistling slyly.*] Phew!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* LEONARD.] More tea, Leonard?

LEONARD.

No, thanks.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Resignedly.*] I *suppose* I must call you Leonard now?

ETHEL.

[*Into her tea-cup.*] What's the matter with "Lenny"?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

I may be wrong, but I don't *think* that it was the fashion in my youth for a young lady suddenly to appear before her

mother and to say, without a note of warning, "Mr. So-and-so is in the drawing-room and we wish to be engaged." Take the case of Ethel's papa—*there's* a case in point——

LEONARD.

I certainly intended to speak to you first, Mrs. Pierpoint.

ETHEL.

[*To* LEONARD.] You fibber!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Ethel!

LEONARD.

Well, I—what I mean is——

ETHEL.

If you *had* done so, I'd never have looked at you again. Surely, if there is one thing which is a girl's own particular business, it is settling preliminaries with her best young man.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

My dear!

ETHEL.

[*Jumping up.*] Anyhow, mother, if you wanted to play the dragon, you shouldn't have been upstairs, sleeping off the effects of an exceedingly heavy lunch, when Lenny arrived this afternoon.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Fiddle, heavy lunch! A morsel of minced chicken——!

ETHEL.

Ha, ha! [*Bending over* MRS. PIERPOINT.] And you don't mind, do you—not actually——[*kissing* MRS. PIERPOINT] as long as——?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

As long as what?

ETHEL.

As long as—Lenny's contented?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Shaking herself.*] Oh, go away.

[*Laughing,* ETHEL *wanders about inspecting the various objects in the room.*

LEONARD.

[*To* MRS. PIERPOINT, *producing his cigarette-case.*] Do you object?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Not in the least. Ethel's papa used to indulge, in moderation.

LEONARD.

[*To* ETHEL, *over his shoulder.*] Cigarette, Ethel?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Ethel, I forbid it.

ETHEL.

[*Putting on her gloves.*] I would, but it makes me swimmy.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* ETHEL.] How do *you* know?

ETHEL.

I've smoked with Zoe Blundell.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

This is news to *me.*

ETHEL.

Zoe smokes like a chimney.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* LEONARD.] By-the-bye, she's in London again.

LEONARD.

[*Uncomfortably.*] Yes—yes.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Ethel called on her this morning at Lancaster Gate.

LEONARD.

Did she?

ETHEL.

[*To* LEONARD.] I told you, Len.

LEONARD.

Ah, yes.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* LEONARD.] Have *you* seen her? I presume not.

LEONARD.

Er—for a few minutes. I was in the neighbourhood on —on Monday, and I noticed the blinds were up, and I—I just rang the bell to—to inquire.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Elevating her eyebrows.*] She received you?

LEONARD.

She—she happened to be in the hall.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

I was going to *say*—a woman in her peculiar position ought hardly——

LEONARD.

No, of course.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Looks ill, I understand?

ETHEL.

Frightfully.

LEONARD.

Does she?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

I am afraid—I am very much afraid—that dear Mrs. Blundell was not *entirely* free from blame in her treatment of that big rough husband of hers.

ETHEL.

[*At the left-hand window.*] Rubbish, mother!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Ethel, you are *too* disrespectful.

ETHEL.

Sorry.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

At the same time, she is an exceedingly attractive person —a trifle vulgar, poor soul, occasionally——

ETHEL.

[*Hotly.*] Mother!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* LEONARD.] But good-natured people frequently *are* vulgar—aren't they?

ETHEL.

[*Going on to the balcony.*] Oh——!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* LEONARD.] You were quite a friend of hers before the sad split, weren't you—quite a friend?

LEONARD.

Yes, I—I always found her a very decent sort.

ETHEL.

[*Her hands upon the rail of the balustrade, calling.*] Mother, do come and look at the tiny men and women.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Men and women——? [MRS. PIERPOINT *rises and goes to the window, whereupon* LEONARD *jumps up as if relieved by the interruption.*] You're soiling your gloves, Ethel.

ETHEL.

Look down there. What tots!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Drawing back from the window.*] Oh, my dear, I can't——

ETHEL.

Do, mother.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

You know I don't care for heights.

ETHEL.

I'll steady you. [MRS. PIERPOINT *timidly ventures on to the balcony.* ETHEL *takes her arm.*] There's been a concert—or a meeting. [*Calling.*] Lenny——

[LEONARD *has walked away to the writing-table gloomily. He is about to join the ladies on the balcony when the door on the left opens and* RIDEOUT, *his servant, appears.*

LEONARD.

[*To* RIDEOUT.] Eh?

[*After glancing discreetly in the direction of the ladies on the balcony,* RIDEOUT *produces a visiting-card from behind his back.* LEONARD *goes to him and takes the card, and looks at it in astonishment.*

RIDEOUT.

[*Quietly.*] There's some writing on it, sir.

LEONARD.

I see. [*In a low voice.*] Where is she?

RIDEOUT.

In my room, sir. I said you were engaged.

LEONARD.

[*Uneasily.*] You didn't tell her who's here.

RIDEOUT.

No, sir; merely some friends to tea.

LEONARD.

All right. I sha'n't be very long. [RIDEOUT *is going.*] Tss—!

RIDEOUT.

[*Stopping.*] Yessir?

LEONARD.

Keep your door shut.

RIDEOUT.

Yessir.

[RIDEOUT *withdraws. Leonard crams the card into his waistcoat-pocket and is again about to join the ladies when* MRS. PIERPOINT *comes back into the room.*

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* LEONARD.] Thank you for showing us your charming little nest. Quite—quite delightful!

LEONARD.

[*Standing by the round table.*] Oh, for bachelor quarters——

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*In the middle of the room.*] There! I declare I often wonder what there is to tempt a bachelor to marry in these days.

LEONARD.

You're not a bachelor, Mrs. Pierpoint.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

No; that's true. That's perfectly true. But I've a distinct remembrance of the rooms Ethel's papa lived in when *he* was a bachelor. [ETHEL *returns and goes to the fireplace.*] They were in Keppel Street, and vastly different from these. [*Turning to* ETHEL.] Have I ever told you that poor papa lived in Keppel Street?

ETHEL.

[*Demurely.*] Yes, mother.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* ETHEL.] And now, my dear, as we have to dine at half-past seven—[*to* LEONARD] what time does *Louise* begin?——

LEONARD.

Oh, if we get there at nine——

MRS. PIERPOINT.

So kind of you to take us—and as Ethel must lie down on her bed for an hour if we want her to look her best —[*pointing to the tea-table*] may I trouble you—my fan?——

[LEONARD *searches for* MRS. PIERPOINT'S *fan among the tea-things.*

ETHEL.

[*Kneeling upon the settee on the left, her elbows on the back of it, gazing into space.*] Mother——

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Eh? [*Receiving her fan from* LEONARD.] Thank you.

ETHEL.

[*Slowly.*] Mother—this is going to be an awfully happy night.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

I'm sure I hope so, my darling. It won't be my fault if it isn't—[*tapping* LEONARD'S *shoulder with her fan*] nor Leonard's.

ETHEL.

Ah, no; I mean *the* night of one's life perhaps.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Oh, I trust we shall have many, many——

LEONARD.

Rather!

ETHEL.

[*Raising herself and gripping the back of the settee.*] No, no; you don't understand, you gabies. In everybody's life there's one especial moment——

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Moment?

ETHEL.

Hour—day—night; when all the world seems *yours*—as if it had been made for *you,* and when you can't help pitying other people—they seem so ordinary and insignificant. Well, I believe this is to be *my* evening.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

One would imagine *I* had never given you *any* pleasure, to hear you talk.

ETHEL.

[*Rising.*] I say, mother, don't make me lie down, and lose consciousness, when I get home. [*Going to* MRS. PIERPOINT *with extended arms.*] Ah, ha! You duck—!

[*In advancing to* MRS. PIERPOINT, ETHEL *knocks over the waste-paper tub with her skirt and its contents are scattered on the floor.*

ETHEL.

[*Going down on her knees and replacing the litter.*] Sorry.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* ETHEL.] You'll crease your skirt, Ethel.

LEONARD.

[*Going to* ETHEL.] Never mind that.

ETHEL.

Oh, but if I do anything clumsy at home—! [*coming upon some fragments of a photograph.*] Oh—! [*trying to fit the pieces together.*] Zoe!

LEONARD.

Yes, I—I——

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Who has moved to the fireplace.*] Pray get off the floor, child.

ETHEL.

[*Finding more pieces.*] Why, you've been tearing up Zoe's photos.

LEONARD.

They're old things.

ETHEL.

That they're not. *This* one isn't, at all events. [*Examining one of the scraps closely.*] "—Firenze."

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Ethel, we *must* be going.

LEONARD.

[*Almost roughly.*] Leave them alone, Ethel.

[*A little startled by his tone, she drops the pieces into the basket and he assists her to rise.*

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Opening the door on the left.*] Come along at once, I insist.

[MRS. PIERPOINT *goes out.* ETHEL *is following her mother when she turns to* LEONARD *who is behind her.*

ETHEL.

[*To* LEONARD, *with a smile.*] Sorry I contradicted you.

[*They kiss hurriedly and* ETHEL *runs after her mother.* LEONARD *follows and closes the door. After a little while, the door is reopened, and* RIDEOUT *enters with* ZOE. ZOE *is dressed as when last seen.*

RIDEOUT.

[*To* ZOE, *as she passes him.*] Mr. Ferris has gone to the lift, ma'am. He won't be a minute.

ZOE.

[*Going to the left-hand window, languidly.*] All right.

RIDEOUT.

[*At the round table, putting the tea-things together upon the tray.*] Shall I make you some tea, ma'am?

ZOE.

[*Looking out of the window, speaking in a dull voice.*] No; I've had tea, in a tea-shop. [*Turning.*] Rideout——

RIDEOUT.

Yes, ma'am?

ZOE.

I should like to tidy myself, if I may; I've been walking about.

RIDEOUT.

[*Going to the door on the right and opening it.*] Cert'nly, ma'am. [*As* ZOE *approaches.*] The hot water flows cold for a few seconds, ma'am.

ZOE.

Is there any scent?

RIDEOUT.

There's some eau-de-cologne on the dressing-table, ma'am.

[*She disappears and* RIDEOUT *closes the door and continues his preparations for removing the tea-things.* LEONARD *returns.*

RIDEOUT.

[*Answering a look of inquiry from* LEONARD.] Mrs. Blundell's tidying herself, sir.

LEONARD.

Oh, yes. [*Moving about the room, irritably.*] Won't she have some tea?

RIDEOUT.

I did ask her, sir. She's had it.

LEONARD.

[*Halting.*] Did Mrs. Blundell—say anything, Rideout?

RIDEOUT.

[*Folding the table-cloth.*] Only that she wanted to see you just for ten minutes, sir, and that she thought she'd wait. And then she wrote on her card and told me to slip it into your hand if I got the opportunity.

LEONARD.

[*Resuming his walk.*] Yes, yes.

RIDEOUT.

[*After a pause.*] What time'll you dress, sir?

LEONARD.

Quarter to seven. I have to dine at half-past.

RIDEOUT.

Which suit 'll you wear, sir?

LEONARD.

[*Considering.*] Er—pink lining.

RIDEOUT.

Theatre, sir?

LEONARD.

Opera. Two pairs o' gloves. [RIDEOUT *goes towards the door on the left, carrying the tea-tray.*] Tss——!

RIDEOUT.

Yessir?

LEONARD.

There's no necessity to put out my clothes yet awhile.

RIDEOUT.

[*Placing the tray upon a piece of furniture so that he can open the door.*] No, sir.

LEONARD.

I'll ring when you can come through.

RIDEOUT.

[*Opening the door.*] Yessir.

LEONARD.

And I'm not at home to anybody else.

RIDEOUT.

[*Taking up the tray.*] No, sir. [*As the man is leaving the room,* LEONARD *comes to the door to close it.*] Thank you very much, sir.

[RIDEOUT *goes out and* LEONARD *shuts the door. As he turns from the door, his eyes fall upon the waste-paper tub. He snatches it up angrily.*

LEONARD.

[*Reopening the door and calling.*] Rideout——

RIDEOUT.

[*Out of sight.*] Yessir?

[RIDEOUT *presents himself at the door without the tray.*

LEONARD.

[*Shaking up the contents of the tub and then giving it to* RIDEOUT.] Burn this waste-paper.

RIDEOUT.

Yessir.

[RIDEOUT *closes the door and* LEONARD *is again walking about the room when* ZOE, *carrying her hat, gloves, and bag, appears on the balcony outside the right-hand window. She enters and they look at one another for a moment without speaking.*

LEONARD.

Hallo, Zo!

ZOE.

Hallo, Len!

LEONARD.

This *is* a surprise.

ZOE.

[*Putting her hat, gloves, and bag upon the round table—nervously.*] Is it?

LEONARD.

I thought you'd dropped my acquaintance for good and all.

ZOE.

N—no, Len. Why should you think that?

LEONARD.

Ha! Well, I bear the marks of the point of your shoe somewhere about me.

ZOE.

Oh, you—you mustn't take me too seriously when I'm in one of my vile tempers. [*A pause.*] I—I'm not—keeping you——?

LEONARD.

No, no.

ZOE.

[*Turning the chair on the left of the round table so that it faces the writing-table.*] May I sit down?

LEONARD.

Do.

ZOE.

I was here three-quarters-of-an-hour ago, but the porter said you were out; so I went and got some tea. [*Sitting.*] You've been entertaining, according to Rideout.

LEONARD.

[*Turning the chair at the writing-table and sitting facing her.*] A couple o' people turned up—old friends——

ZOE.

You *are* a gay dog. [*Suddenly, staring at the writing-table.*] Why—where—where am *I*?

LEONARD.

You?

ZOE.

You always have a photograph of me, standing on your writing-table.

LEONARD.

O—oh, it's——

ZOE.

[*Remembering.*] And there isn't one now—[*glancing at the door on the right*] in your——!

LEONARD.

The frames had got beastly shabby. Kideout's taken 'em to be done up.

ZOE.

[*Flutteringly.*] Honour? [*A pause.*] Honour?

LEONARD.

If—if I say so——

ZOE.

I beg your pardon. No, you wouldn't *out* my photos because of a—because of a little tiff, would you?

LEONARD.

L—likely!

ZOE.

[*Rising and going to him.*] I'm sure you wouldn't, dear boy; I'm sure you wouldn't. [*Again there is a pause, during which she passes her hand over his shoulder caressingly.*] Len——

LEONARD.

Eh?

ZOE.

[*Standing behind him.*] After that—stupid fall-out of ours this morning—what d'ye think I did?

LEONARD.

Did?

ZOE.

Ha, ha! I—I took it into my head to—to pay Theodore a visit.

LEONARD.

Pay him a visit!

ZOE.

It—it was one of my silly impulses—I was so upset at having offended you——

LEONARD.

Did you see him?

ZOE.

Y—yes.

LEONARD.

And what had *he* to say for himself?

ZOE.

Oh, I—I made such a mash of it, Len.

LEONARD.

Mash——?

ZOE.

Yes, I—I let him worm it out of me.

LEONARD.

Worm it out of you?

ZOE.

Worm it—all out——

LEONARD.

Worm *what* out of you?

ZOE.

[*Faintly.*] P-Perugia——

[*There is a silence, and then* LEONARD *rises with an angry look.*

ZOE.

[*Holding the lapels of his coat.*] Don't be savage with me, Len. It wasn't altogether my fault. He *had* heard of it from Claud Lowenstein. And it's of no consequence; none whatever. It's just as you said this morning—he *is* ready to make matters smooth for us.

LEONARD.

[*Blankly.*] Smooth—for us!

ZOE.

Yes, to let *me* divorce *him*. He's promised—he's promised to do so, if you'll—only——

LEONARD.

[*His jaw dropping.*] If *I*——?

ZOE.

If you'll give him your word that you'll do the right thing by me.

LEONARD.

The right thing——!

ZOE.

Marry me. [*A pause.*] I—I suppose he—I suppose he'll demand to see you. Or perhaps he'll make Peter Mottram a go-between.

[*Again there is a silence, and then he walks away from her. She follows him with her eyes.*

LEONARD.

[*Thickly.*] But you—you wished me good-bye this morning—finished with me.

ZOE.

[*Clenching her hands.*] I know—I know! [*Coming to him.*] But he—he insulted me, Len—stung me. He flung it in my face that you—that you'd chucked me; that I was your cast-off, your leavings. I couldn't bear it from him; and I—I told him that you were all eagerness to make me your wife. [*A pause.*] Well! And so you were—this morning!

[*He sits in the chair on the left of the round table, his elbows on his knees, holding his head.*

LEONARD.

Zoe——

ZOE.

W-what?

LEONARD.

These people I've had to tea this afternoon—ladies—two ladies——

ZOE.

Yes?

LEONARD.

Mrs. Pierpoint was one of them—and—and——

ZOE.

Mrs. Pierpoint——?

LEONARD.

[*Raising his head and looking at her.*] The other was —Ethel.

ZOE.

Eth-el——!

LEONARD.

[*In a low voice.*] You—you made me do it.

ZOE.

[*Dazed.*] I—I made you——! [*Drawing a deep breath.*] Oh-h-h! [*She turns from him slowly, and seats herself in the chair at the writing-table.*] I—I'd forgotten Ethel.

LEONARD.

Yes, you persuaded me to do it. [*A pause.*] Zo, you egged me on to do it.

ZOE.

[*Quietly.*] You—you didn't lose much time, did you?

LEONARD.

I—I was furious when I left you—furious.

ZOE.

[*With an attempt at a smile.*] Why, you—you must have bolted straight off to her.

LEONARD.

I—I went to the club and had some food; and then I came back here and changed—and——

ZOE.

Got rid of those photos!

LEONARD.

I was furious—furious.

ZOE.

And then you—you bustled off to Sloane Street! [*He rises and paces the room. After a while she pulls herself together.*] Oh, well, it—it can't be helped, old boy.

LEONARD.

[*Agitatedly.*] It *must* be helped; it *must* be helped. I must get out of it; I must get out of it. Somehow or other, I must get out of it.

ZOE.

Get out of it?

LEONARD.

The—the Pierpoints——!

ZOE.

Oh, don't talk such utter rubbish; I'd kill myself sooner. [*He throws himself into the chair on the right of the left-hand window.*] No, I'm a rotter, Len, but I'm not as low as that. Oh, no, I'm not as low as all that. [*She rises and goes slowly to the round table and, in a listless way, pulls the pins out of her hat.*] I—I'll be toddling home now. [*Tracing a pattern on the crown of her hat with the hat-pins.*] Home——! [*Knitting her brows.*] I shall clear out of that

—big—flashy—empty——! [*Putting on her hat.*] Ha, há! I *have* made a mash of it, haven't I! My father always said I was a heedless, irresponsible little puss. [*With a puzzled look, her arms hanging at her side.*] There was a lot o' good in me, too—any amount o' good——!

[*She is drawing on a glove when she turns her head in the direction of the door on the left. At the same moment,* LEONARD, *also looking at the door, gets to his feet.*

ZOE.

[*Listening.*] What's that, dear?

[*He tiptoes to the door, opens it an inch or two, and puts his ear to the opening.*

LEONARD.

[*Carefully closing the door and turning to her.*] Blundell.

ZOE.

[*Under her breath.*] Oh——!

LEONARD.

[*In a whisper.*] Don't worry. I've told Rideout—— [*There is a pause. They stand looking at each other in silence, waiting. Suddenly* LEONARD *returns to the door and, without opening it, listens again.* Curse the brute, he won't go!

[*He faces her irresolutely and, in a panic, she picks up her bag and her other glove and runs out at the door on the right.* LEONARD *is in the middle of the room when the door on the left is thrown open and* THEODORE *and* PETER *enter followed by* RIDEOUT. THEODORE *and* PETER *have their hats on.*

RIDEOUT.

[*To* LEONARD.] I—I beg your pardon, sir——

LEONARD.

[*To* RIDEOUT.] All right.

THEODORE.

[*To* PETER, *with a hoarse laugh.*] You give the man half-a-sovereign, Peter; that'll soothe his feelings.

PETER.

[*To* THEODORE, *sharply.*] Sssh, sssh! Theo——!

[RIDEOUT *withdraws.*

THEODORE.

[*Advancing to* LEONARD.] Ho! Not at home, hey?

LEONARD.

[*Facing him.*] No, I'm not; not to *you.*

PETER.

You be quiet, Ferris.

LEONARD.

[*To* THEODORE.] What the devil do you mean by forcing your way into my place?

THEODORE.

[*Raising a walking-cane which he carries.*] You——!

[PETER *quickly puts himself between the two men as* LEONARD *seizes the chair on the left of the round-table.*

PETER.

[*To* THEODORE, *endeavouring to get the walking-cane from him.*] Give me that. [*To* LEONARD.] You keep a civil tongue in your head. [*To* THEODORE.] Give it me. [*Holding the cane.*] You know what you promised. Give it up. [THEODORE *resigns the cane to* PETER *and walks away to the fireplace where he stands with his back to the others.* PETER *lays the cane upon the writing-table and then turns to* LEONARD.] You ought to be ashamed o' yourself.

[*Lowering his voice.*] You see the man's labourin' under great excitement.

LEONARD.

[*Sullenly.*] I dare say a good many people in London are labouring under excitement. That's no reason why they should have the run of my flat.

PETER.

[*Coolly.*] Will you oblige me by sittin' down and listenin' to me for a moment?

LEONARD.

Any man who treats me courteously 'll be treated courteously in return. [*Sitting in the chair on the left of the round table.*] I can do with *you,* Peter.

PETER.

Can you? Then you'll be so kind as to drop addressin' me by my christian-name. [*Sitting in the chair at the writing-table.*] Ferris——

LEONARD.

[*Curling his lip.*] Yes, Mister Mottram?

PETER.

Mrs. Blundell called upon her husband to-day—this afternoon, about three o'clock——

LEONARD.

[*With an assumption of ease.*] Oh? Did she?

PETER.

And made a communication to him—a communication of a very painful, very shockin' character. [*A pause.*] I presoom you don't require me—or Blundell—to enter into particklers?

LEONARD.

[*In a low voice.*] Oh, for heaven's sake, no.

PETER.

We may take it, without goin' further, that what Mrs. Blundell has stated is absolutely the truth?

LEONARD.

Absolutely. [*A pause.* THEODORE *moves from the fireplace to the left-hand window and stands there staring at the prospect.*] One thing, though, she mayn't have stated as clearly as she might——

PETER.

What's that?

LEONARD.

That she—that she's an injured woman—badly dealt with by her husband, and worse by your humble servant; and——

PETER.

And——?

LEONARD.

And that both Blundell and I damn well deserve to be hanged.

[THEODORE *turns to* LEONARD *fiercely.*

PETER.

[*To* THEODORE.] Well! Have you any objection to *that?*

[THEODORE *draws himself up, as if to retort; then his body relaxes and he drops into the chair on the left of the window.*

PETER.

[*To* LEONARD.] Now, then! Attend to me.

LEONARD.

Yes?

PETER.

Obviously it's impossible, after what's transpired, that Mr. and Mrs. Blundell should ever live together again.

LEONARD.

[*Slightly surprised.*] She didn't——?

PETER.

I believe there *was* an idea that her husband should go back to Lancaster Gate. [*With a wave of the hand.*] But we needn't discuss *that*. We'd better come at once to the object of this meetin'.

LEONARD.

Object——?

PETER.

The best method of providin' for the safety—and happiness, we hope—of the unfortunate lady who's gone and made a bit of a munge of her affairs.

LEONARD.

[*Steadily.*] Yes?

PETER.

[*Deliberately.*] Ferris, Mrs. Blundell has given her husband to understand that, if existin' obstacles were removed —if she were a free woman, in point o' fact you'd be willin' to marry her.

LEONARD.

She's correct.

PETER.

That you're keen on it.

LEONARD.

[*With a nod.*] Keen on it.

PETER.

Good. [*Dropping his voice.*] We're all tiled here. Are you prepared to give Blundell your word of—of——?

LEONARD.

Honour? Can't you say it? [*Hotly.*] D'ye think that because a fellow's done a scoundrelly act once in his life——!

PETER.

That'll do—your word of honour. That bein' so, Blundell undertakes, on his part, not to oppose Mrs. Blundell's action for divorce. On the contrary—— [*turning to* THEODORE.] Theo——?

THEODORE.

H'm?

PETER.

Your word of honour?

THEODORE.

[*In a muffled voice.*] My—word of honour.

PETER.

[*To* THEODORE *and* LEONARD, *shortly.*] Thank'ee. And both of you empower me to—to go to Mrs. Zoe——? [*A pause.* PETER *turns to* THEODORE.] Eh?

THEODORE.

Yes.

PETER.

[*To* LEONARD.] And you? [LEONARD *is silent.*] What's the matter?

LEONARD.

[*After a further pause, slowly.*] Look here. I don't want either of you two men to suspect me of—of playing double——

PETER.

Playing double!

LEONARD.

I tell you honestly—Mrs. Blundell—Mrs. Blundell declines——

PETER.

Declines——?

LEONARD.

Yes; she—she refuses——

[THEODORE *rises.*

PETER.

[*Also rising—to* THEODORE.] Sssh! You keep out of it. [*To* LEONARD.] Ah, but you haven't seen Mrs. Blundell since——?

THEODORE.

[*To* PETER, *prompting him.*] Since she left me to-day——

PETER.

[*To* LEONARD.] Since she left her husband this afternoon—[*a pause*] have you?

LEONARD.

Y-yes; I have.

THEODORE.

[*To* PETER.] Where?

PETER.

[*To* LEONARD.] Where? [*There is a further silence.*

THEODORE.

[*Under his breath.*] What's this game, Peter? [*Loudly.*] What's this game?

PETER.

[*Restraining him.*] Don't you interfere. [*To* LEONARD.] Ferris——

LEONARD.

[*Rising.*] Mottram—Mrs. Blundell called on me—about a quarter-of-an-hour ago. We—we were talking the matter over in this room when we heard Blundell kicking up a riot in the passage. [*Glancing at the door on the right.*] She—

she's here. [*There is a movement from* THEODORE.] Mottram, I depend on you——

[PETER *looks at* THEODORE *who, in obedience to the look, goes back to the fireplace.* LEONARD *moves to the door on the right and then turns.*

LEONARD.

[*Speaking across the room to* THEODORE.] Blundell, I —I've given you my word of honour—and—and I abide by Mrs. Blundell's decision. [*To* PETER, *pointing to* THEODORE.] Mottram, I—I depend on you—[*He opens the door and calls softly.*] Mrs. Blundell—[*There is no response.*] Mrs. Blundell——

THEODORE

[*Looking down into the grate.*] Call her Zoe. [*Laughing again hoarsely.*] Why the devil don't you call her Zoe?

LEONARD.

[*Calling.*] Zoe——

[*Still obtaining no reply, he goes into the next room.* THEODORE *comes to* PETER.

THEODORE.

[*To* PETER.] Some game up, hey?

PETER.

Sssh, sssh!

THEODORE.

What is it? What trick is she up to now, hey?

[LEONARD *reappears.*

LEONARD.

[*Standing in the doorway, bewildered.*] I—I can't make it out.

PETER.

What?

LEONARD.

She—she's not there.

THEODORE.

Ha! Hooked it?

LEONARD.

[*Looking towards the balcony.*] She must have gone along the balcony without our noticing her, and through the kitchen. [*Looking at* PETER.] She must have done so.

PETER.

Why?

LEONARD.

You know there's no other door——

[*He crosses to the door on the left. As he gets to it, it opens and* RIDEOUT *presents himself.*

RIDEOUT.

[*In an odd voice.*] Sir——

LEONARD.

[*To* RIDEOUT.] Has anybody passed through your kitchen?

RIDEOUT.

N-no, sir.

LEONARD.

[*After a pause, sharply.*] What d'ye want?

RIDEOUT.

There—there's been an accident, sir.

LEONARD.

Accident——?

[*At this moment* THEODORE *and* PETER *turn their heads towards the balcony as if they are listening to some sounds reaching them from a distance. Giving* LEON-

ARD *a frightened look,* RIDEOUT *withdraws quickly.* LEONARD *turns to* THEODORE *and* PETER *in time to see them hurrying on to the balcony through the left-hand window. He follows them as far as the window and recoils before them as they come back into the room after looking over the balustrade.*

THEODORE.

[*Staggering to the door on the left.*] Oh, my God; oh, my God; oh, my God——! [*He disappears.*

LEONARD.

[*To* PETER, *shaking a trembling hand at him.*] An accident! It's an accident! [*Coming to* PETER, *appealingly.*] An accident!

PETER.

Yes—an accident—— [*Gripping* LEONARD's *arm.*] She told me once it would be in the *winter* time——!

[*They go out together.*

THE END

LIST OF PLAYS

BY

ARTHUR WING PINERO

PUBLISHED IN THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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